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ABSTRACT

This document presents research findings about the results well-run small schools produce. It begins by giving definitions of the various types of small schools and smaller learning communities, such as focus or "theme" schools, freestanding schools, and schools-within-a-building. It discusses the requirements for success as identified by researchers and practitioners, and cites barriers to implementing effective small schools. An important point is that a small school does not provide a quick fix to problems in educating students or maintaining safety by virtue of its size, but, rather, it creates an environment that acts as a facilitating factor in promoting increased student learning, and enhancing collegiality among teachers and personalized relationships between teachers and students. Other benefits of well-run small schools include increased order and safety, higher school attendance and graduation rates, higher levels of extracurricular participation, greater parent participation and satisfaction, more positive teacher attitudes and satisfaction with their work, high-quality curricula that are well-aligned with national goals, and greater cost-effectiveness compared to larger schools. The paper ends with a list of World Wide Web resources and an annotated bibliography. (Contains 53 references.) (RT)

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New Small Learning Communities: Findings From Recent Literature

When done well...small schools can be remarkable for improving the intellectual and social life of children, youth, educators, and parents.

—Michelle Fine & Janis Somerville, 1998

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Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

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New Small Learning Communities: Findings From Recent Literature

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December, 2001

Creating Communities of Learning & Excellence
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

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Introduction

The creation of schools as educational communities that consciously intend to provide all students with the kind of rigorous, intellectually challenging education that used to be restricted to an elite is no mere downsizing of big bad institutions. It is a radical notion and an even more radical endeavor.

—Jacqueline Ancess, 1997, p. 19

A large and increasingly consistent body of research suggests that we should be moving, not toward larger high schools, but expeditiously toward smaller ones.

—Tom Gregory, 2000, p. 2

In the popular press, articles informing readers about the impressive benefits of small schools continue to be written and read, but for many people in and outside the education profession, this is old news. Research conducted over the past 15 years has convincingly demonstrated that small schools are superior to large ones on many measures and equal to them on the rest (Raywid, 1996; Cotton 1996). Indeed, noted small school researcher Mary Anne Raywid (1999) has written that the superiority of small schools has been established "with a clarity and at a level of confidence rare in the annals of education research" (1).

These findings, together with strong evidence that smaller schools can narrow the achievement gap between white/middle class/affluent students and ethnic minority and poor students has led to the creation of hundreds of small schools in large cities around the U.S., including Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, Seattle and others. Many of these schools have been in operation long enough that they, too, have been the focus of research projects. The findings are quite positive, and many more of these small, urban schools are being planned and implemented.

Research has also revealed that smaller schools are *safer* schools. This is of great significance to the multitudes who agree with Wasley, et al. that "the most horrifying recent development in large schools is the increase of violence...." (2000, 2). Large schools typically do not have the negative effects on white students' *achievement* that we see in large schools serving poor and/or minority students.[1] But nearly all of the high-profile school shootings of recent years have occurred in large high schools attended primarily by middle class white students. Consequently, many people in those settings, too, have begun to look at smaller schools as a potential, partial solution to problems of school violence—either because they know the research or because they instinctively sense that small can often mean closely knit and mutually supportive.

[1] Indeed, Howley, Strange and Bickel (2000) write that "providing smaller schools in very affluent communities could well prove to be counterproductive in terms of achievement" (4). They also note, however, that "even in affluent communities, schools serving 1,500 or more students might have diseconomies of scale and bureaucratic operating modes that are not educationally hospitable" (4).

In response to the evidence for the learning and social benefits of small schools, government and private funding sources have made millions of dollars available to large schools—and especially large high schools—to create "small learning communities" (SLCs) within the buildings they already inhabit. The federal Smaller Learning Communities Initiative has allocated $165 million for this purpose, and the Carnegie Foundation of New York, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Annenberg Challenge, the Joyce Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trust, the Annie E. Casey Foundation and others are providing additional millions for reforms that include school downsizing. Many local initiatives and coalitions are also investing resources in creating smaller schools.

These three factors—research findings on the effectiveness of small schools, the proliferation of new small schools in urban settings, and the current availability of grant money to stimulate further school downsizing—are heartening to those who believe that small schools can be a powerful means of improving education.

But even small schools enthusiasts concede that the current growth of the "small schools movement" is a mixed blessing rather than a pure one. Research analyst Robert Gladden (1998) writes that "One fear of 'small school' reformers and researchers is that the growing success of 'small school' reform might transform the concept into a buzzword with little meaning" (114). Small school practitioner and author Deborah Meier is concerned that poorly executed school downsizing may lead to a situation in which "most will water down their innovations or give up altogether" (1998, 86). And a review by research and development specialist, Sarah Dewees, cautions that, "without full implementation, many of the benefits of small-scale schooling...cannot be realized" (1999, 2).

These experts are not theorizing. They and others have already observed cases of downsizing gone wrong. Mary Anne Raywid, after describing one failed effort, comments,

> *With such piecemeal and partial implementation...there were minimal improvements in student performance and virtually no gains in authentic achievement, equity, empowerment, the establishment of a learning community, the stimulation of reflective dialogue, or accountability.* (36)

Which is to say "minimal improvements" and "virtually no gains" in the very areas for which small schools *can be* so helpful. Not that inadequate implementation is necessarily the result of insufficient will on the part of school staff. The Architecture Research Institute (1999) reports that,

> *some schools are limited in their ability to fully implement the small school concept, because of their relationship to the school district and other schools within it, or decisions and regulations imposed by the administrators of the building where they are located.* (1-2)

Interest in small schools currently runs high. Planning and implementation of additional small schools is in full swing. Resources for school downsizing are currently more plentiful than ever before (and perhaps more plentiful than they will ever be again). But since not all small school restructuring outcomes are equal, care must be taken to insure that these resources and efforts will be truly productive. The last thing small school proponents want to see is a future in which school downsizing ends up on the dead fad pile, with students reaping few benefits from it, funding agencies declaring it a bust, and school personnel across the country remarking wistfully, "Oh, we tried small schools, but they didn't work." Since they do, in fact, work very well under the right conditions, it is important to specify what those conditions are. Beginning with definitions of the various types of small schools and smaller learning communities, this paper presents research findings about the results well-run small schools produce, discusses the requirements for success as identified by researchers and practitioners, cites barriers to implementing effective small schools, directs readers to some Web resources, and provides an annotated bibliography.

This information has relevance for anyone who wants better educational results and a safer, more supportive quality of school life. In particular, it is directed toward policymakers at all levels who provide direction and resources for educational reform, as well as administrators, teachers, parents, and community members, who are interested in what small schools researchers, practitioners, and external service providers have to say.

Recent Small Schools Literature

There is growing interest in returning to small schools and mounting research that small schools function better than big ones.

—William Ayers, Gerald Bracy, and Greg Smith, 2000, p. 2

Since we are past having to prove the virtues of small schools, this paper does not provide another comprehensive review on that broad topic. Instead, it is based on a representative sample of research and other literature, nearly all of which was published within the past five years—over 50 documents in all. Most focus on relatively new, deliberately small schools in urban settings. The research documents include studies, reviews, and reports that provide results of both studies and reviews. This paper also draws from articles featuring practitioner and other first-person experiences of small schools, and articles by those who provide research-based technical assistance for small school restructuring. Finally, this paper also reflects various other publications, such as guidelines documents, resource listings, school profiles, conference proceedings, and fact sheets. The main research documents are in the Key References section of the bibliography, and the other sources are in the General References section.

Most of the literature focuses primarily on high school students, which is not surprising given that high school downsizing is the main focus of funding, effort, and study. Most of the rest address all levels or unspecified populations. Groups other than students that the reports address include teachers/other school staff, parents, and other community members, with many reports focusing on more than one group.

In terms of outcomes of interest, the documents focus on student achievement; attendance; graduates/dropouts; student behavior, including classroom disruption, vandalism, violence, theft, and drug/alcohol use; course completion; extracurricular participation; affiliation/belongingness; student attitudes toward school; college-related variables, including acceptance, entrance exam scores, and grades; equity across race/ethnicity/class; parent/community satisfaction and other variables; teacher satisfaction and other variables; curriculum quality; and costs.

Small Is Not Enough

Experience and research make very clear that school size does indeed matter—but they also make clear that 'small' is no silver bullet.

—Michelle Fine and Janis Somerville, 1998a, p. 104

It seems to be part of human nature that we are perennially tempted by the prospect of a quick fix, a silver bullet, a simple and powerful answer to our problems. So it is not surprising that current interest in smaller schools has led some people, including some educators, to hope that smallness as such has the power to improve schooling. Researchers and educators with small school experience are quick to point out that it has no such power, while at the same time clarifying what smallness *can* do. Researcher Michelle Fine says, "'small' is simply a vehicle for doing other rigorous, accountable work" (quoted in Gewertz, 2001, 4). Wasley, et al. (2000), which includes Fine among others, provide more detail:

> *We believe...that smaller school size can facilitate leaders' abilities to lead a school to improved performance and teachers' abilities to build student skill and knowledge in important ways....It is important to avoid seeing small schools as the sole solution to all that ails education. Rather, we would suggest that it is a key ingredient in a comprehensive plan to improve education.* (66)

In a similar vein, Gladden (1998) writes,

> *[S]maller size establishes the groundwork for deeper school reforms by improving and streamlining the relationship between faculty and administrators but, in itself, does not trigger these types of reforms...Smallness alone cannot create satisfying relationships or academic focus.* (123)

To researcher Mary Anne Raywid (1996),

> *It appears that downsizing may be necessary to schools' ability to effectively initiate the changes essential to improvement. While downsizing provides no guarantee that these other changes will follow, it may be a crucial step toward launching them.* (51)

One of the best descriptions of what smallness can and cannot do is provided by Visher, Teitelbaum and Emanuel (1999), who write,

> *Researchers who have studied small schools have stressed that reducing school size alone does not necessarily lead to improved student outcomes. Instead, they have concluded that school size should be seen as having an indirect effect on student learning...school size acts as a facilitating factor for other desirable practices. In other words, school characteristics that tend to promote increased student learning—such as collegiality among teachers, personalized teacher-student relationships, and less differentiation of instruction by ability—are simply easier to implement in small schools.* (21)

Defining "Small Schools"

Researchers disagree on what number constitutes "small."

—Catherine Gewertz, 2001, p. 3

The terminology distinguishing one type from another...is highly idiosyncratic.

—Mary Anne Raywid, 1996, p. 17

Once disabused of the notion that small school size all by itself is somehow magical, educators, students, parents, and others are better situated to appreciate the results that well-conceived and -operated small schools are producing. Before launching into those findings, though, some basic definitions will be helpful. What do we mean by "small" and, for that matter, what do we mean by "schools"?

Not that the researchers and other writers are in complete agreement about these matters. Looking at size, for example, different writers have different opinions about the proper size for a small high school. A few put the maximum at 500 students, but most assert that an upward limit of 400 is best. Others note that the size of the most successful small urban high schools is smaller still, with enrollments closer to 200 than 400. According to Raywid (1999), "In general, those who emphasize the importance of the school as a community tend to set enrollment limits lower than do those who emphasize academic effectiveness, at least as measured by test scores." (2)

With this in mind, consider the words of veteran small school principal Deborah Meier (1998), who offers an operational rather than numerical perspective:

> *It helps if schools are of a reasonable size, small enough for faculty members to sit around a table and iron things (such as standards) out, for everyone to be known well by everyone else, and for schools and families to collaborate face-to-face over time. Small enough so that children belong to the same community as the adults in their lives instead of being abandoned in adultless subcultures. Small enough to both feel safe and be safe. Small enough so that phony data can easily be detected by any interested participant. Small enough so that the people most involved can never say they weren't consulted.* (86)

This theme of size in relation to collaboration, partnership and community figures prominently throughout the small schools literature. In particular, it reappears as a consideration when researchers and practitioners identify requirements for a successful small school.

It is a testament to human creativity that educators have developed and operate so many different kinds of small learning environments. As Sammon (2000) puts it,

There is no one model for the creation of small learning communities. Their variety is as individual as the schools and school systems in which they are housed. (16)

This variety can be confusing, and the confusion is exacerbated by the fact that different writers sometimes offer different definitions for the same term or subsume some small school categories under others. Raywid (1996) writes:

The nomenclature [for different kinds of small learning units] is awkward—and significant—because the structures range in nature all the way from tentative, semi-units organizationally supplementing a high school's departments to totally separate schools which just happen to be located under the same roof. (16)

Further, for some of the experts, defining is hardly a neutral act; instead, it is suffused with the writers' beliefs about the merits of the different small learning structures.

The following is an attempt to navigate this somewhat precarious territory and bring some clarity to the variety of school types and terminology.

- ***Small learning community***. Any separately defined, individualized learning unit within a larger school setting. Students and teachers are scheduled together and frequently have a common area of the school in which to hold most or all of their classes (Sammon, 2000).

- ***Autonomous small school***.[2] May be in its own building or in a building with another school(s), but is organizationally, fiscally, and instructionally independent. Its teachers and students are self-selected. In theory, a large school could create small learning communities that would be autonomous, but experience shows that this is difficult to achieve, and therefore most truly autonomous small schools begin their lives with students and teachers who are new to the buildings they inhabit. Many researchers and practitioners regard a high level of autonomy as a prerequisite for school success. Consequently, they define an ideally autonomous school as one that controls, not only its structure, budget, and learning program, but also (1) establishes its own transportation and school-day schedule; (2) has its own teachers and students; (3) has its own classroom space; and (4) once basic agreements are struck with others in the building about schedules and facilities, its use of space and time cannot be infringed upon.

- ***Focus school (also called "theme" or "theme-based" school)***. Small school practitioners and researchers use these terms to describe a type of new, autonomous,

[2] This information is drawn from the work of Ancess & Ort, 1999; Gladden, 1998; Gregory, 2000; Kacan & Schipp, 2000; Lashway, 1998-99; Raywid, 1996; Small Schools Project, 2001a; and Wasley & Lear, 2001. Long lists of sources such as this are likely to be distracting to readers if sprinkled through the text. Consequently, citations in text are used only for quotations or references to specific content. Otherwise, supporting resources are cited in footnotes.

small urban school that was created with a "focus"—a theme around which teachers and students coalesce because of their shared interest in it. This distinctiveness, together with autonomy and secured space, is regarded as responsible for the impressive success many of these schools have achieved.[3]

- ***Historically small school***. Researchers Wasley, et al. (2000) use this term to denote a small school that predates the new, small-by-design schools in Chicago that are the focus of their large-scale study. Such a school is also an autonomous small school.

- ***Freestanding school***. Despite the term, a freestanding school does not necessarily have its own building. It denotes a school with its own space, budget, and principal that may or may not share a building (Duke & Trautvetter, 2001; Small Schools Project, 2001b). As such, a freestanding school is a type of autonomous small school.

- ***Alternative school***. The Small Schools Information Center of the Architecture Research Institute (1999) writes that "the word 'alternative' is used in different ways in various cities" (2) and goes on to explain the differences. Duke and Trautvetter (2001) offer this definition:

  "Alternative school" may refer to any freestanding school or school-within-a-school, but increasingly the term is associated with small schools for students who have been suspended or expelled from a regular school, or who have experienced academic difficulties. A large high school may contain an alternative school, which may operate during regular school hours or as an after-school or evening program. (5)

- ***School-within-a-school***.[4] A school-within-a-school (SWAS) operates within a larger "host" school, either as the only SWAS in that school or one of several. Schools-within-schools (SWS) represent different degrees of autonomy, but typically have their own personnel and program, and their students and teachers are self-selected. Staff of a SWAS must defer to the principal of their host school on matters of school safety and building operations. Its principal reports directly to a district official. Writers often use the terms "school-with-a-school" and "schools-within-schools" as umbrella terms for other kinds of small learning communities.

- ***School-within-a-building***. Conceiving of SWS as autonomous units, both Raywid and Meier have suggested that the term school-within-a-building might be preferable to SWAS, because it reinforces the concept of autonomy.

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[3] See Gladden, 1998; Klonsky & Klonsky, 1999; and Duke & Trautvetter, 2001.

[4] This definition is compiled from definitions provided by the Architecture Research Institute, 1999; Duke & Trautvetter, 2001, Kacan & Schipp, 2000; Lashway, 1998-99; Raywid, 1996; Small Schools Workshop, 2001b; USDOE, 2001; and Wasley, et al., 2000.

- ***House plan***.[5] In a house plan, students and teachers are assigned to smaller groupings within the larger school. Students in each house may take some of their core courses together and share the same teachers, and each has its own discipline policies and student government. The house plan usually coexists with the larger school's departmentalized structure and shares that school's curriculum, instructional approaches, and sometimes its extracurricular program as well. Houses may be organized by grade level, such as the "ninth grade house plan" or vertically, encompassing two or more grades. In Sammon's view, a house is the same thing as a small learning community.

- ***Career academy***.[6] A career academy is a school-within-a-school that focuses on a broad occupational area, such as engineering, natural resources, or the hospitality industry. Teachers and students are self-selected. The career academy curriculum directs students' attention to the application of school-based learning by including in its curriculum work-based learning experiences with businesses in the community.

- ***Pathway, pod or cluster***. These terms usually refer to a sequence of career-related and/or academic courses that lead toward graduation. Students may or may not be scheduled together in a manner that constitutes a small learning community. According to Sammon (2000), when they are, each pod or cluster contains classrooms for teachers of core subjects and perhaps a teacher workroom. A typical arrangement might involve four classrooms—English, social studies, science, and mathematics—with the four teachers functioning as a team, instructing the same group of 80 to 120 students and planning together. Students usually take additional subjects elsewhere in the school, but at least half of each day is spent in the same pod or cluster." (5)

  Career clusters or pathways are broad-based industry areas, which include all careers from technical through professional levels. They provide a structure that organizes students according to their career goals and interests and become the foundation for integration of high academic standards, technical skills and knowledge. Career clusters identify academic and technical skills needed by students as they transition from high school to postsecondary education and/or employment (USDOE, 2001).

- ***Minischool***.[7] A minischool is somewhat more distinctive than a house, but less so than a SWAS, in that it has its own curriculum and instructional approach, but it is still under the authority of the host school and shares that school's resources.

- ***Multiplex***.[8] In a multiplex arrangement, the entire building is made up of schools-within-a-school, usually three of them, according to Wasley, et al (2000). The term includes new buildings that are specifically designed to house multiple small schools.

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[5] Architecture Research Institute, 1999; Duke & Trautvetter, 2001; Kacan & Schipp, 2000; Raywid, 1996; Sammon, 2000; and USDOE, 2001 contributed to this definition.
[6] See Duke & Trautvetter, 2001; Sammon, 2000; and USDOE 2001.
[7] See Architecture Research Institute, 1999; Cushman, 1999; Lashway, 1998-99; and Raywid, 1996.

- ***Multischool***. A multischool is another term for a multiplex.

- ***Scatterplex***.[9] A scatterplex is like a multiplex, except that the two or more small schools that share a principal are in different buildings.

- ***Charter School***.[10] Usually but not always small; a charter school is a public school that operates under a contract which specifies its mission, program, goals, students served, methods of assessment, and ways to measure success. Depending on the school, charters may be operated by educators, parents, community leaders, educational entrepreneurs or some combination of these. The principal is granted some degree of decision-making freedom and is held accountable for the performance of the school by the entity granting the contract, typically the state or the local board.

- ***Pilot school***. "Pilot school" is the term given to new small schools in Boston which, although they are not charter schools, do have full control over curriculum, staffing, and the school calendar. "Their objective is to provide successful new models. And if successful, influence the entire Boston school system." (Architecture Research Institute, 1999, 2)

- ***Magnet school***. Magnet schools usually have an academic specialization focus and typically draw students from the entire school district (USDOE, 2001). There may or may not be admission requirements to attend. Sammon (2000) provides a reminder that magnet schools began almost 30 years ago for the purpose of desegregation without forced busing (14).

Happily, understanding the workings and virtues of small learning communities does not require memorizing these definitions with all their nuances. For our purposes here, the main point to remember is Raywid's earlier observation about different degrees of autonomy—that SLCs range all the way from part-time supplements to a large school's operations to schools that are totally separate.

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[8] This definition is drawn from the work of Architecture Research Institute, 1999; Duke & Trautvetter, 2001; Small Schools Workshop, 2001b, and Wasley, et al., 2000.

[9] See Architecture Research Institute, 1999; Small Schools Workshop, 2001b; and Wasley, et al., 2000.

[10] Charter school information is from Architecture Research Institute, 1999; Small Schools Workshop, 2001b; and WestEd/USDOE, 2000.

The Results of Well-Run Small Learning Communities

When done well...small schools can be remarkable for improving the intellectual and social life of children, youth, educators, and parents. Successful small schools provide an educational environment where all students can achieve at high levels and where staff have exciting opportunities to teach and learn–and small schools can be a systematic strategy for inciting momentum into urban school reform.

–Michelle Fine and Janis Somerville, 1998, p. 104

When we compare findings from the research on the new generation of small schools with findings from the older small schools research, we find that the effects produced by the new schools are the same—only more so. That is, like the staff of other good small schools, those who work in newer schools that are well conceived and well run find ways—some conventional and some radical—to use smallness to produce an array of highly desirable outcomes.

Achievement

Research shows that those attending these small schools achieve at higher levels than do students in large schools, both on standardized achievement tests and other measures. Speaking of one "teacher-director" in a school-within-a-school, Cushman (1999) writes:

> *While test scores at Muscota come in above the district average Menken sets more store by the students' year-end written reflections, which the school maintains as part of their records. "Kids here write about their work in a very personal way," she says. "They have clearly internalized our expectations about the importance of math, reading, learning about the world. These things are not testable, but in a small school, they are certainly observable."* (3)

Researchers observe that the effects of smallness on achievement are indirect, being mediated through other small-school features as quality of the social environment and students' sense of attachment to the school. Mitchell (2000) reminds us that in the studies conducted by Howley and others, school size had such a powerful positive effect on the achievement of poor students that it even trumped the beneficial effects of class size (4).

Equity

In the introduction to his replication study, Bickel writes that,

> *School size is a variable which continues to receive attention as a determinant of educational achievement. Recently, size has figured conspicuously in discussions of educational equity, as well as effectiveness.* (1999, 60)

The fact that these mostly poor, mostly ethnic minority children have notably higher achievement in small learning environments is extremely encouraging to those who have previously searched in vain for an educational approach that could narrow the "achievement gap" between these students and their white and higher-SES peers. And the effect is not only well documented, but also sizeable—"remarkably strong and consistent from state to state," as Howley, Strange, & Bickel put it in the report of their multi-state studies of school size in impoverished communities (2000, 4). Specifically, they found that small schools reduced the negative effects of poverty "by between 20 and 70 percent, and usually by 30-50 percent, depending on grade level" (4).

Likewise, in his large-scale 1998 review of research, Gladden published corroborating findings: compared with demographically similar students in large schools, the school performance of poor and minority students in small schools was not only better, but "significantly better" (114). Nine of the eleven studies he reviewed found

> *a consistent and often strong relationship between small school size and more equitable academic achievement across ethnicity and socioeconomic background.* (126)

Affiliation/Belonging[11]

School size research consistently finds stronger feelings of affiliation and belonging on the part of small-school students than large-school students. Students (and teachers) in smaller environments can come to know and care about one another in a way that is difficult to achieve in large schools, and their participation in school activities is genuinely needed. This holds true for contemporary small-by-design schools as well, and these schools typically feature at least two additional attributes that foster a sense of community. One is that students often self-select into these settings based on interest in a topical area or career focus around which a school is organized. Another is that staff (who are frequently self-selected, too) take an active—even insistent—interest in students' learning and general well-being. The Architecture Research Institute researchers write that, "the extra attention that students get from the staff affords them greater educational, psycho-emotional, and social services, and also makes them feel part of a community" (3).

[11] Architecture Research Institute, 1999; Ayers, Bracey, & Smith, 2000; Cotton, 1996; Gladden, 1998; Klonsky & Klonsky, 1999; Raywid, 1996; and Wasley, et al., 2000.

Safety and Order[12]

An obvious benefit of student affiliation and belonging is increased order and safety. The full range of negative social behavior—from classroom disruption to assault and even murder—is far less common in small schools, traditional or new, than it is in large schools. Regarding classroom discipline problems, Cocklin quotes an Australian student commenting on the way that classroom misbehavior at his large his school interferes with learning—something that had not occurred at his small elementary school:

> *Some of the kids don't want to learn and they muck up—so, the teachers pay most of the attention to them to try and get them to work. But, the kids who really need the attention—because they're stuck on something—they won't give it to them because they're busy with the bad kids.* (1999, 9)

Regarding more dangerous student behavior, Raywid and Oshiyama's article on school safety issues in the aftermath of the Columbine shootings, reminds us that "there is overwhelming evidence that violence is much less likely to occur in small schools than in large ones" (2000, 445). Gladden's 1998 research review identifies, among the benefits of small schools, that students feel safer, no doubt because (as he also notes) there is a lower incidence of drug use, assault, vandalism, victimization, violence, suspensions and expulsions (16).

Truancy and Dropouts[13]

School attendance and graduation rates are higher in small schools generally and better still in deliberately small schools. These findings, as Gladden observes, are at the heart of the educational enterprise:

> *The ultimate test of a school is its ability to graduate students in a timely manner and provide them with the opportunity to go to college or to find a better job than they would without a high school degree. Students attending smaller high schools are more likely to pass their courses, accumulate credits...and attain a higher level of education than students who attend larger schools.* (1998, 127)

The fact that "dropout rates are consistently, and often strikingly, lower in small schools" (Cross City Campaign, 2000a, 1) is also germane to the question of schooling costs, which is addressed further on.

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[12] See Architecture Research Institute, 1999; Ayers, Bracey & Smith, 2000; Cocklin, 1999; Cotton, 1996; Cross City Campaign, 2000a; Cushman, 1999; Fine & Somerville, 1998; Gladden, 1998; Gregory, 2000; Muir, 2000-01; Oxley, 1996; and Wasley, et al., 2000.

[13] Ancess & Ort, 1999; Ayers, Bracey & Smith, 2000; Cotton, 1996; Cross City Campaign, 2000a; Duke & Trautvetter, 2001; Gladden, 1998; Gregory, 2000; and Stiefel, et al., 2000.

Preparation for Higher Education[14]

The evidence shows that the presence and perseverance of students in small high schools continues to serve them after they graduate. Ancess and Ort's description of the dozen small schools created from two large, failing, New York City high schools includes the fact that they have a remarkable 89 percent college-going rate (1999). While that is unusually high even for the new generation of small inner-city schools, the large-scale study of Chicago small schools conducted by Wasley and others also found significantly more college bound students among the graduates than demographically similar graduates of large schools.

Extracurricular Participation[15]

In small schools generally, levels of extracurricular participation are higher, and students report both having more important roles in extracurricular activities and deriving more satisfaction from those activities than students in large schools. To some degree, this is true for the new generation of small schools, too, but since these schools do not attempt to provide all the programs that a large comprehensive school would offer, one of two things usually occurs. If the school shares a building with another school community—or communities—it may share an extracurricular program. The total number of students would then determine a given student's chances of making the team or winning the election. Some small schools operate their own extracurricular programs, but the role of those programs may be very different from those of the traditional comprehensive high school. In these small schools, write Wasley and others, "traditional extracurricular activities exist but are peripheral to school life" (2000, 24).

Parent Involvement and Satisfaction[16]

Since parents often participate directly in forming and operating small schools (and some school start-ups require them to do so), it is not surprising to find that levels of both parent involvement and parent satisfaction are greater in small than in large school environments. Ancess, a small-school principal for many years, writes that "Fifteen years after Manhattan East [a parent-founded small school] began, the 'pioneer parents,' as they call themselves, still comment on how 'starting a school was one of the highlights of our lives'" (1997, 11).

Communication between parent and teacher is much more meaningful when both are well acquainted with the child. Parents who find it intimidating to confront the sheer scale and

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[14] See Ancess & Ort, 1999; Architecture Research Institute, 1999; Cotton, 1996; Small Schools Project, 2001a; Wasley, et al., 2000.

[15] See Cotton, 1996; Gladden, 1998; Muir, 2000-01; Raywid, 1996; and Small Schools Project, 2001a.

[16] See Ancess, 1997; Ayers, Bracey & Smith, 2000; Fine & Somerville, 1998; Oxley, 1996; Small Schools Project, 2001a; and Wasley, et al., 2000.

bureaucratic complexity of large schools typically feel more welcome—because they *are* more welcome, indeed *needed*—in small schools. The parent-school relationship is discussed further as part of a later discussion of elements critical to the success of small learning environments.

Teacher Attitudes and Satisfaction[17]

School-size research, the older and the newer, usually finds that teachers in small learning environments feel in a better position to make a real difference in students' learning and general quality of life than do teachers in large schools. They have closer relationships with students and other staff, experience fewer discipline problems, and are better able to adapt instruction to students' individual needs. Add to this the fact that teachers in most of the recently established small schools are there by *choice* and have more decision making authority, and it is not surprising that one finds markedly higher morale among them.

Wasley, et al. (2000), comparing the new small Chicago schools to large schools with similar student populations, report that the small-school teachers: felt more committed to and more efficacious, tended to report a stronger professional community, are far more satisfied, are more likely to collaborate with colleagues, are more likely to engage in professional development that they find valuable, are more able to build a coherent educational program for students between disciplines and across grade levels, demonstrate a greater sense of responsibility for ongoing student learning, provide a more focused learning environment for students, and build a more varied instructional repertoire for working with students (38-49).

Curriculum Quality[18]

An argument sometimes advanced against small schools is that their curriculum is inferior to that of large schools. Critics declare that more students means more staff and a greater variety of curricular offerings, which in turn will meet individual student needs and provide them better preparation for college or other postsecondary plans. While that line of thinking seems reasonable enough, the research findings do not bear it out. For one thing, according to Roellke's 1996 research summary on curriculum adequacy and quality, "researchers have found...that core curricular offerings in small high school settings overall are well aligned with national goals." In fact, they have determined that high schools enrolling as few as 100 to 200 students offer base courses in core curricular areas such as mathematics and science at rates comparable to high schools enrolling between 1,200 and 1,600 students (1). Haller, et al. (1990) studied the relationship between school size and comprehensiveness in nearly 500 schools and found that, once "graduating class size exceeds 100 students," a school is able to offer advanced mathematics courses equal to those offered by large schools. They also

[17] Architecture Research Institute, 1999; Ayers, Bracey & Smith, 2000; Duke & Trautvetter, 2001; Gladden, 1998; Lee & Loeb, 2000; and Wasley, et al., 2000.

[18] See Cotton 1996; Gladden, 1998; Gregory, 2000; and Roellke, 1996.

discovered that "quite small schools [those graduating between 25 and 49 students per year] are able to offer a program that is nearly equivalent in comprehensiveness" (113) to that of large schools.

Moreover, says Roellke, "large size is no guarantee that [additional] courses will be offered or that student enrollments in the courses will be high" (2). In his 1998 literature review Gladden reports similar findings: "Although large schools offer more courses than small schools, these additional courses only benefit a small percentage of students" (114). Specifically,

> *An additional striking findings was that no more than 27 percent of students take advantage of courses uniquely offered by large schools...On average, not more than 12 percent of students took courses unique to large schools.* (129)

Haller, et al. (1990), having made a similar discovery, challenge the argument for school consolidation on grounds of curriculum adequacy. "Perhaps we are obtuse," they write,

> *but why the state should have an overriding interest in consolidating schools so that a few students are able to study calculus, physics, and a fourth year of German—to say nothing of rock poetry—eludes us.* (118)

After a discussion of the close connection among large size, diverse curricula, and academic tracking, Gladden (1998) takes the typical curriculum argument and turns the tables:

> *Instead of being a deficit, the inability of small schools to differentiate students by offering a diverse curriculum seems to be an advantage. It forces small schools to teach a core academic curriculum in heterogeneous classes—and this factor is associated with a higher and more equitable level of achievement among students.* (129)

The subject of heterogeneous class placements and equity is addressed further in the section on key elements of successful small schools.

Roellke (1996) notes that many smaller systems enhance their offerings through shared programs and well-focused curricula. He then goes on to identify technology that small schools are using to supplement their curricula as needed. (2)

Costs[19]

When people argue against small schools, if it is not on the basis of curriculum quality, it is usually on grounds of costs. Unfortunately, many people in position to make far-reaching decisions about school size base those decisions on the unexamined assumption that large

[19] Ayers, Bracey & Smith, 2000; Cotton, 1996; Cross City Campaign, 2000a; Gregory, 2000; Raywid, 1996; Stiefel, et al., 2000; Wasley et al., 2000; and Wasley & Lear, 2001.

schools reflect economies of scale, that is, that they have a lower per-student cost than small schools. For some years, school-size researchers have pointed out that this is not necessarily true—that some large schools are exorbitantly expensive, and some small schools are very cost effective. Cotton reported this finding in a 1996 review, along with other research findings to the effect that the required disciplinary and other administrative personnel of large schools are so costly that, past a certain point, per pupil cost goes *up*—and keeps going up as the school grows larger. These findings go a long way toward countering the cost argument for large schools, but more impressive still is a recent line of research that looks at the issue in a new way.

In their large-scale 1998 study of new small schools in New York City, Stiefel and others reasoned that a more useful comparison than cost per student is cost per student *graduated*, and by this measure they found that small schools, with their much higher graduation rates, are the most economical schools of all. Subsequent research has validated their findings. We know from research in sociology and economics that the lifetime earnings and many other quality-of-life indicators are usually better for high school graduates than for dropouts. Looked at in this way, providing "at risk" students a good small-school education is an investment that will continue to pay off for the rest of those students' lives.

Key Elements of Success

Analyses...are beginning to appear of the essential elements of small schools and the traits associated with success. Lists differ, though common themes are clearly discernible.
–Mary Anne Raywid, 1999, p. 3

This report has noted that some downsizing efforts have failed to improve the quality of schooling and that small size alone is certainly not enough to do so. What small size does is to provide an optimal setting for high-quality schooling to take place. It facilitates the use of organizational arrangements and instructional methods that lead to a more positive school climate and higher student learning. Experienced practitioners and knowledgeable researchers have much to say about the conditions and practices that can enable small schools to achieve their potential—to become true learning communities. These are organized within the categories of self-determination, identity, personalization, support for teaching, and functional accountability.

Self-Determination

Autonomy[20]

Autonomy gets first mention because those who study small-school restructuring agree that it is vital. New small learning communities must be able to create a vision and bring it into being, and the experts insist that this will not happen without broad decision-making authority. Best of all, they say, is the authority to make decisions in all key spheres of activity—space, schedule, budget, curriculum, instruction, and personnel. They also recognize that this is often not feasible, but they do recommend that the subunits within a subdivided school have as much autonomy as possible. "No school's autonomy is total, of course," writes Raywid (1996, 31), "but unless subunits are granted some degree of freedom to determine how to manage themselves, they will find it almost impossible to establish a distinct identity." Of the scores of small Chicago schools they studied, Wasley and others (2000) write:

> *When the small schools were guaranteed enough autonomy to bring their ideas to fruition, they were more invested in the school and its students. Many of the teachers and principals in these small schools were intellectually strong and found the problem-solving that came with creating their own schools very compelling. Ensuring that they have the opportunity to bring their ideas to fruition is an important incentive to encouraging teachers to undertake renewal and improved accountability within the system.* (65)

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[20] See Ancess & Ort, 1999; Architecture Research Institute, 1999; Cross City Campaign, 2000a; Cushman, 1999; Duke & Trautvetter, 2001; Gewertz, 2001; Gladden, 1998; Lear, 2001a,b; Meier, 1998; Mitchell, 2000; Raywid, 1999; and Wasley, et al., 2000.

Duke and Trautvetter (2001) draw the same conclusion: "Units that enjoy a high degree of autonomy are more likely to generate a unique culture and an inspired commitment to the success of the program" (8). Regarding the New York schools with impressive student achievement and an 89 percent college-going rate, Ancess and Ort (1999) attribute much of these schools' success to the fact that "each school is organizationally fiscally, and instructionally independent and autonomous..." (1). Concerns about central office intrusion were raised by many of the researchers and practitioners whose work I consulted, for example:

> *A critical lesson from the past decade of small-school creation is that such schools need autonomy to succeed. Tom Vander Ark, the executive director of education for the Gates Foundation, maintains that to personalize learning, small schools need charter school-like freedom to govern their own budgets, curricula, and staffing. Centralized district systems and school boards can undermine that independence by keeping control over everything from textbooks to school schedules.* (Gewertz, 2001, 4)

Rick Lear of the University of Washington-based Small Schools Project, which provides technical assistance to Gates grant recipients, writes,

> *Autonomy is critical. To be successful, a small school needs autonomy in terms of budget, staffing, curriculum, scheduling, and focus...In designing a set of small schools that will occupy the same building, imagine the autonomy each school would have if each were located three blocks away from the others. Take that as the starting point, and work backwards.* (2001b, 2)

Deborah Meier remarks on the relationship between autonomy and accountability:

> *It helps if those most directly involved have sufficient autonomy over critical decisions. Only then will it be fair to hold people accountable for the impact of their decisions. This will entail creating democratic adult communities that have the power to make decisions about staffing, leadership, and the full use of their budget as well as about the particulars of scheduling, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment.* (1998, 87)

Together with autonomy, Raywid has identified—and other researchers have confirmed—the importance of two related elements: separateness and distinctiveness.

Separateness[21]

In her 1996 review of different kinds of small learning communities, Raywid has this to say:

> *"Separateness" is both literal and metaphoric. It is a matter of physical space: a group of contiguous rooms set off in some perceptible way from the rest of the building....It is also*

[21] See Duke & Trautvetter, 2001; Kacan & Schipp, 2000; Raywid, 1996; Visher, Teitelbaum & Emanuel, 1999; and Wasley, et al., 2000.

> *a matter of psychic distance,' consisting of the freedom to pursue a set of values differing from those of the host school....It is also the distance to establish a school climate...and a set of procedures...which differ from those of the host school.* (31)

Duke and Trautvetter (2001) stress that, along with its own curricular focus and administration, a small school that shares a building should "have a distinct physical identity" (8). Yet, in a concession to the reality of most school downsizing, they also state that,

> *where existing facilities have been reorganized into subunits, the most popular approaches have been to designate particular corridors, wings, or floors for particular subunits. These options may not always provide complete separation, but they offer a sense of common identity without major adjustments to the physical plant.* (5)

The main point here seems to be that school downsizing planners should establish such physical and psychological boundaries as they can between units, so that the teachers and students begin to identify themselves with the small unit rather than the overall building. Among the "best practices" identified by the Cross City Campaign (2000b, 1) is that "the high school is small or *feels small*" (italics mine). Separateness is an important element in fostering a feeling of smallness.

Distinctiveness[22]

In order for students and teachers to become part of, and cohere around, a small school/learning unit, it must also have a positive attribute or attributes that set it apart from its host school or other "building-mate(s)." Raywid (1996) remarks that "to attract students and to promote a sense of affiliation, the units need to reflect the same sort of individuality and distinctiveness that people do." She gives as examples "the prominence of humor and/or the featuring of collaboration" (32). Meier writes:

> *Good schools are filled with particulars—including particular human beings. And it is these human beings that lie at their heart, that explain their surprising successes. In fact, it is these particulars that inspire the passions of those involved and draw upon the best in each.* (1996, 86)

According to Ancess (1997),

> *Being special has enabled new school starters to break from the deadening uniformity and anonymity of bureaucracy and invigorate the process of schooling...Being special can mean being committed to a specific identity...Being special can be a way new schools distinguish themselves and try to provide an education of distinction for their students.... It can be how a school becomes visible, knowable, and accountable.* (8-9)

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[22] See Ancess, 1997; Lear, 2001b; Meier, 1998; and Raywid, 1996.

Self-Selection of Teachers and Students[23]

The most successful restructured learning units are those whose teachers and students have both chosen to be there. This makes sense intuitively, and the Architecture Research Institute researchers make the reasons explicit:

> *A self-selected staff and constituency results in a school community that is cohesive and committed to common goals. Ideally, therefore, small school teachers must volunteer to work in the school. Similarly, students benefit most when they elect to enroll, and when the student body is assembled on the basis of shared interests.* (1999, 3)

In their article promoting small size as a means to decreasing the likelihood of school violence, Raywid and Oshiyama (2000)propose self-selection as an alternative to current methods of student placement: "Why not try interests as the basis for grouping? Why not let teachers who share an interest—in the arts, or in the sea, or in sports, or in critical thinking—band together to offer a program that will attract students with similar interests?" (448).

Flexible Scheduling[24]

Many researchers have pointed out that the rigid scheduling of teacher and student time in the typical comprehensive high school has more to do with controlling students' behavior than with providing meaningful learning experiences for them. By way of contrast, Gregory (2000) points out that

> *Issues of control seem to disappear in these [small] schools; teachers tend to have equalitarian relationships with their students; and change is a familiar quality of their lives; they seem to be able to respond much more flexibly to new circumstances.* (10)

Small size allows school personnel to make shifts in their schedules as needed to support practices the school deems important, such as curriculum integration, common planning time, sustained blocks of learning time, and community-based learning experiences for students. "Flexible scheduling and faculty teamwork allow for a level of depth and an interdisciplinary approach that provides students with a much richer educational experience," write Fine and Somerville, in the course of identifying essential attributes for successful small schools (1998a, 106).

Aware of these virtues, the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching included the matter of scheduling

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[23] See Architecture Research Institute, 1999; Cross City Campaign 2000a,b; Gladden, 1998; Klonsky & Klonsky, 1999; Meier, 1998; Raywid & Oshiyama, 2000; Small Schools Project, 2001a; and Small Schools Workshop, 2001a,b.

[24] See Ancess, 1997; Cross City Campaign, 2000b; Fine & Somerville, 1998a; Gregory, 2000; Legters, 1999; NASSP, 1996; Sammon, 2000; and Wasley, et al., 2000.

among their recommended principles for high school reform: "High schools will develop flexible scheduling that allows for more varied uses of time in order to meet the requirements of the core curriculum" (1996, 45).

Small size does not, of course, insure that a school or learning community will have the control needed to create flexible scheduling; in fact, without concerted effort, it probably will not. But since such control is identified among the reasons that downsized units need maximum autonomy, planners are well-advised to build into newly downsized units as much scheduling autonomy as possible.

Identity

Vision/Mission[25]

"There must be a sense of 'where we are going,'" write Fine and Somerville (1998a, 106). Small school restructuring experts insist that those starting up a new school/learning community must go through the process of creating a vision and mission that can guide and inspire those associated with it. The vision, according to Ancess,

> *frames discussions on the business of school-keeping and is the foundation on which members of the school community construct common ground and the school culture.* (1997, 3)

Further, it must be able to "coalesce the members of the school community so that they work coherently and collaboratively on behalf of the students toward the achievement of agreed upon goals" (3). Wasley, et al. (2000) also stress the importance of broad-based involvement in the school's vision, indicating that "all invested stakeholders, including administrators, faculty, students, parents, community members, and external partners, should be in accord and involved in the process of forming, implementing , and sustaining the vision" (64). Differentiating successful from less successful schools in terms of their *application* of the vision, they go on to offer a cautionary note:

> *When small schools used their vision or mission as a tool to measure their own progress, they tended to get further than those who rarely referred to it after their initial planning stages.* (64)

Thematic Focus[26]

In addition to their cultural particularities, successful small schools/units typically have a thematic focus. This may be a specialized curriculum such as a career area, an instructional

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[25] See Cross City Campaign, 2000a; Fine & Somerville, 1998a; Mohr, 2000; Sammon, 2000; Small Schools Workshop, 2001a; and Wasley, et al, 2000.

[26] See Architecture Research Institute, 1999; Lear, 2001b; Small Schools Project, 2001a; Small Schools Workshop, 2001b; Wasley, et al., 2000; and Wasley & Lear, 2001.

approach such as project-based learning, a broad topic such as the sea, or some other organizing principle. Typically, students and their parents make decisions about what school the students will attend based on those schools' different areas of focus.

The other meaning of focus is that, in terms of schools, it is the opposite of "comprehensive." A "focus school" does not attempt to be all things to all people; it goes for depth rather than breadth. Lear describes the strategy of such a school in this way:

> *Out of the universe of things we could do, these are the things we will do, and we will do them very, very well...New small schools should be elegant in an aesthetic or mathematical sense, with nothing wasted, nothing extra.* (2001a, 1)

Focus on Student Learning[27]

Since the days of the early "effective schools" research, it has been documented that the most successful schools practice a kind of cheerfully unrelenting push for high achievement for all of their students. Sometimes called "academic press," this collective focus says, in essence, that it is not enough to care about students—or rather, that "caring about children means caring about their learning and being quite serious about it" (Mohr, 2000, 156). Mohr goes on to say that "many of the early small schools—alternative schools—got the reputation for creating pleasant climates but not fostering serious academic work" (156).

A supportive social environment is rather like small size itself; it is an important precondition for productive schooling, but does not guarantee it. Gewertz (2001) quotes Fine as saying that

> *Small...will produce a sense of belonging almost immediately, but hugging is not the same as algebra. Rigor and care must be braided together, or we run the risk of creating small, nurturing environments that aren't schools.* (4)

Ancess (1997) issues a similar exhortation to those involved in the contemporary small schools movement:

> *[I]f all these new schools are is small and humane, that will not be enough. And if the opportunity to develop close relationships with students and know them well is not leveraged on behalf of improving opportunities for their intellectual development, achievement, and success, the promise of these new small schools will be squandered.* (1)

Finally, Wasley, et al. (2000) quotes the Consortium on Chicago School Reform findings indicating that "students learn substantially more when they experience high levels of academic press and strong social support together, but they learn much less when they experience only one of these conditions" (65).

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[27] See Ancess, 1997; Ancess & Ort, 1999; Gewertz, 2001; Mohr, 2000; and Wasley, et al., 2000.

Detailed Planning.[28]

Out of the experience of seasoned small-school practitioners comes the observation that, while the prospect of starting a new school is exciting, the detailed planning that it requires can be tedious. Nevertheless, such planning is essential for success.

> *Attending to details is grueling, focused work devoid of the glamour that draws many into school founding. But clear, concrete, and detailed underpinnings and procedures are behind every powerful idea that schools faithfully implement. These develop over time through trial, error, self-scrutiny, and relentless revision by those individuals responsible for their implementation.* (Ancess, 1997, 14)

The appendix to Ancess's paper provides detailed guidelines for developers of downsizing plans.[29] Suffice it here to include key elements. "A useful plan for implementing a school" writes Ancess, "needs to include a vision statement and a description of the following components:

- The proposed student population and the recruitment, admission, and acceptance/ rejection process
- The projected school organization when it is complete
- Administrative procedures
- The instructional program
- Student and school assessment plans
- Staffing categories, roles, level of experience, and hiring procedures
- Governance structure
- Parent involvement
- Mechanisms for professional development
- Mechanisms for internal and external communication
- Methods for assessing how well the strategies for implementing the vision are likely to achieve it
- A student program for the first term
- Sample student and teacher schedules for one week
- A budget for the first year
- Space needs for the first year and a projection for the complete school, and
- A detailed plan for the first day, first week, and the first term (5)

The researchers at the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR) recommend that schools spend a full year on the planning process (Legters, 1999, 21).

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[28] See Ancess, 1997; Legters, 1999; Sammon, 2000; and Wasley, et al., 2000.

[29] See also Sammon (2000), which is a book offering guidelines for planning and implementing smaller learning communities. In addition, see Wasley, et al. (2000), who identify conditions for startup and for ongoing development.

Personalization

Knowing Students Well[30]

Small school/learning unit proponents typically declare that a major reason these schools are safer and more successful than large schools is that staff members are much more likely to know all of their students well. When teachers and students are able to build relationships, both are motivated to work and to make a success of the schooling enterprise. Teachers, moreover, can become knowledgeable about students' learning strengths and needs and identify ways to respond to them in a way that is not possible in the typical large high school. Lear (2001a) regards knowing students well as being second only to autonomy among critical elements for success:

> *High personalization follows closely after autonomy as a key requirement. Schools are filled with particular, individual kids, and only real, particular knowledge of each of those kids—and the freedom to act on that knowledge...can make a school truly successful.* (2)

Personnel in the new generation of small schools seek to capitalize on the possibilities offered by small size by building into their structures ways for staff to know all students well. Writing about successful small schools in New York City, Ancess and Ort (1999) note that,

> *Each school has strategies that enable teachers to know students well, to closely monitor their progress, and to provide academic and social supports and interventions necessary for success.* (3)

Of the Chicago small schools they have helped to start and maintain, Klonsky and Klonsky observe that "each has...a commitment to knowing each student as an individual" (1999, 38). As a practical matter, what this means to the Small Schools Project people in Washington is that every student is known well by more than one adult in the school and has an advisor/advocate who works closely with him and his family to plan a personalized program (2001a, 1).

Heterogeneity/Nontracking[31]

Many researchers, external service providers and experienced small-school practitioners tell us that the positive achievement and very positive equity results they see are due largely to the fact that the schools with which they are involved do not practice academic tracking.

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[30] See Ancess & Ort, 1999; Cross City Campaign, 2000b; Gregory, 2000; Klonsky & Klonsky, 1999; Lear, 2001a; Mohr, 2000; Raywid & Oshiyama, 2000; Small Schools Project, 2001a; USDOE, 2001; Wasley, et al., 2000; and Wasley & Lear, 2001.

[31] See Gladden, 1998; Lear, 2001b; Legters, 1999; Mohr, 2000; NASSP, 1996; Oxley, 1996; Raywid, 2000; and Small Schools Project, 2001a.

For a long time researchers have been reporting that minority and poor young people are overrepresented in low tracks in conventional large high schools.[32] They have also found that the learning content and methods offered to low-track classes are typically far less stimulating to students than those of higher-track classes. Researchers and practitioners have also known for many years that, ordinarily, once placed in a given track, a student's fate is sealed: the system is not sensitive to changes in students' intellectual development and does not review placements for appropriateness. Probably for the foregoing reasons, research has been reporting for decades that placement in a low or "average" track has a negative impact on students' academic performance and self-concepts—and that tracking confers few benefits even for those in high tracks. Yet, despite these repeatedly corroborated findings, most high schools continue to track their students. Sometimes this obduracy is based on lack of understanding about the negative effects of tracking, but just as often, school personnel simply do not know what else to do. And it may be that so long as we continue to send students to large comprehensive high schools, there will be no real alternative.

Small school practitioners, however, have found that heterogeneous groups of students—those that large high schools do not seem to be able to serve effectively—can be accommodated and educated productively in small learning environments. After spending considerable time "in the trenches," Mohr observes that,

> *Many effective small schools are organized in heterogeneous groupings within which individual needs are met....Teachers can begin to learn how to meet multiple needs of students with multiple abilities through the use of groups, anecdotal evaluations, and individual conferences. This means knowing students in a way that is much more thorough and much more personal than is possible in large high schools....* (2000, 150)

There is deliberate tracking, of course, but there is also inadvertent tracking. Even when our intentions are good, Legters (1999) and others warn that "the forces of academic differentiation run so deep in high schools that tracking may be sustained in subtle ways" (19) and gives as real-life examples creating some career academies that are geared to college prep students, while others are geared to those who are "less motivated." Fine and Somerville (1998a) write that "small schools must transform the entire school and school system, not become either magnets or a euphemism for tracking" (112). Lear (2001b) echoes this concern and insists that

> *...the population of each school should be very close to the overall school population in terms of demographics, or you'll almost certainly create one or more "elite" schools from the start.* (2)

[32] See Oakes, 1985.

Looping[33]

In Fine and Somerville's article on essential small-school elements, they state that, "To support high achievement for all students, creative educational options—such as having one group of teachers remain with the same students over time—are made available to teams" (1998a, 108). And indeed, experienced practitioners and researchers typically note that in successful small schools a given group of students often remains with the same teachers for multiple years. This arrangement assures that students will be known well by more than one adult and is conducive to the formation of a community of learners. Oxley's study of downsizing efforts led her to conclude that

> *Small-unit organization...allows teachers and students in large schools to form bonds of familiarity, identification, and support. In small units, comparatively small numbers of students and teachers interact with one another; these groups are stable across years, and the range of activities they share is expanded. Under these conditions, students and teachers are more likely to get to know one another, to respect and support each other.* (1996, 46)

Finally, the Texas Education Agency researchers found that one of the main strategies used "to create a community of learners" in their study is "academic teaming, in which an interdisciplinary team of teachers shares a common group of students" (1999, 27).

Parent and Community Involvement[34]

The research base on the importance of parent and community involvement with elementary and middle schools is larger than that pertaining to high school. The recent literature on small learning communities, however, identifies parent and community participation in the life of the school as both needed and easier to achieve than it is in large schools. For one thing, parents are often the driving force—or one of the driving forces—for establishing small learning communities, and they often have an ongoing hand in both governance and instruction. In addition, like school staff and students, parents respond favorably to the smaller-scale and more personalized climate.

Nearly every report consulted in preparation for this paper mentions the key role of parents in these small school communities. Among the characteristics of successful SLCs with which the Washington Small Schools Project works, is that "they view parents as critical allies, and find significant ways to include them in the life of the school community" (2001a, 1). In Ancess's experience as a small school principal who has participated in the startup of several small schools, "the integral involvement of parents in the formation of a new school can have a powerful impact on parents personally and on conditions at the school" (1997, 11). The

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[33] See Cross City Campaign, 2000; Fine & Somerville, 1998; Oxley, 1996; Small Schools Project, 2000a; and Texas Education Agency , 1999.

[34] Ancess, 1997; Cushman, 1999; Fine & Somerville, 1998a,b; Gewertz, 2001; Gladden, 1998; Lear, 2001b; Meier, 1998; Mohr, 2000; Oxley, 1996; Sammon, 2000; Small Schools Project, 2001a; Small Schools Workshop, 2001a; and Wasley, et al., 2000.

Architecture Research Institute's researchers state that "parents must be more involved in [the school's] operation and in their children's performance there" (1999, 3). Mitchell (2000) writes optimistically about the role of parents in the deliberately small contemporary school:

> *Small schools may revive the role of parents and neighbors in the governance of their school. Over the years, large, centralized school systems have steadily eroded this role... In many of the new generation of small schools, parents and community members are actively involved in running the school.* (6)

In a section of their report called, "What Makes a Small School Work?" Wasley, et al. (2000) include as a key component that, "Relationships with parents are strong and ongoing." Within the successful small schools they studied, advisors and parents communicate regularly, and some of them schedule individual advisor-student-parent meetings several times a year. (23)

Based on the experience of successfully downsized schools, Ancess (1997) offers advice to those who are just beginning:

> *Neighborhood organizations, businesses, social agencies, local colleges and universities, and the central/district office are among those that constitute the extended community. When the new school reaches out to forge alliances and establish relationships, it can generate good will, confidence, local support, and resources, all of which contribute to its development.* (11)

One type of SLC, the career academy, is especially dependent on relationships with the surrounding community. Along with a broad-based career theme and an integrated sequence of courses, Sammon (2000) writes that "each academy has work-based experiences [and] strong partnerships with business and community partners" (13). Service learning projects also involve interacting with community groups. Wasley, et al. (2000) provide a window into school-community relations in Chicago's successfully downsized schools. Their observation about reengagement of the community parallels Mitchell's comments above about the reinvolvement of parents:

> *External partners, whether they are cultural institutions, businesses, or community advocacy groups spend time inside schools, and could know teachers, administrators, children, and their families. To reengage these constituents in our most important public institutions is by itself a tremendous boon.* (63)

In addition to the support provided by community groups, individual community members also make contributions, such as reviewing and responding to students' work portfolios and exhibitions (Wasley & Lear, 2001, 24).

Researchers as far back as Barker and Gump (1964) observed that, in small schools, the participation of all students is needed to populate teams, clubs, student government, and so on—no one is redundant. It is likewise true that the small learning community can

make productive use of the talents of as many parents and community members as wish to be involved.

Support for Teaching

Leadership/Decision Making[35]

Describing the function of leaders in small learning communities, Ancess (1997) waxes poetic:

> *Effective leaders feel the pulse, sing the song, and beat the rhythm of their school. They get to know it inside-out so that they can negotiate the competing priorities of the different stakeholders and mediate the inevitable tensions. They do what is necessary to make the center cohere.* (16-17)

She goes on to say that these leaders "strive for the authority of competence and commitment rather than hierarchical status. They seek respect rather than fear" (17).

Leadership cannot be the exclusive purview of principals—many SLCs don't even have a full-time or on-site principal—but is assumed by teacher-leaders as well. Wasley, et al. (2000) found that, in Chicago's many successful small schools, principals often teach and teachers make administrative decisions about matters directly involving students (23). Ancess identifies benefits associated with such an arrangement:

> *Leaders who also teach have direct access to the pedagogical challenges and dilemmas that confront the staff on a daily basis. They can stay in close touch with the classroom. They can understand intimately the working conditions teachers need in order to be effective. They can use their firsthand experiences and knowledge of the school's learners to participate with the faculty in fashioning solutions. When new school directors can do the thing they are asking others to do, when they can be instructional as well as administrative leaders, they enjoy greater credibility with their staff and so does the pedagogy they want staff to implement.* (1997, 18)

Cushman (1999), together with the principal of three small schools that each have a teacher-director, elaborate further:

> *The new administrative arrangement not only empowers teachers but frees up more of [the principal's] schedule, allowing her to work collaboratively with her faculty on important issues. "I spend more time in shared decision making with the leaders of the small learning communities," she says. "I'm in classrooms more, helping teachers with instructional matters. I have time to make stronger connections with our community partners."* (2)

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[35] Ancess, 1997; Cross City Campaign, 2000b; Cushman, 1999; Gladden, 1998; Mohr, 2000; Small Schools Workshop, 2001b; and Wasley & Lear, 2001, and Wasley, et al., 2000.

Oxley's 1996 research led to this observation: "The research on school size...suggests that one way in which large schools produce negative student outcomes is through their adverse effect on school management, particularly on consensus-building and staff involvement in decision-making" (46). By contrast, successful SLCs are characterized by decision making processes that are broadly inclusive. Principals and teacher leaders, other staff, students, parents, and other community members come together to reach decisions that will affect the entire school community. Among the best practices identified by the Cross City Campaign (2000b) is that "both students and teachers exercise choice and make decisions in all aspects of school life" (22). Mohr's take on the issue of shared leadership and decision making is that "[b]uilding a small school is too much trouble unless an integral part of its mission is creating new ways of working together and shifting power and authority" (2000, 147).

In addition to being shared, decision making in successful SLCs is also based on—and motivated by—the review of data about the effectiveness of current practices. The large-scale, book-length study Wasley and others (2000) conducted with Chicago's small schools led them to offer this finding:

> *...looking for evidence of problems from real sources of data within the school strengthened the resolve of both faculty and administrators to take meaningful steps to improve student conditions....When the whole group was working on a solution, students within the school got a more coherent message about what they needed to do to improve.* (64)

These researchers also encourage personnel in colleges and universities to "engage with small schools in action research to enable data-driven decision making [and] conduct reciprocal research that will help the small schools understand their strengths and weaknesses" (68).

Professional Development and Collaboration[36]

Mohr (2000) identifies some of the features of the kind of professional learning community at work in successful SLCs:

> *Teachers who work on teams not only improve their craft but also begin to see the patterns in their work and relationships. They learn together, critiquing one another's practice by looking at student work. Principals who have their own networks learn from and with each other, building professional knowledge. Having a regular time to talk with other school leaders about their work means improving their craft, developing intellectually, and seeing the similarities across schools.* (148)

The key features of a professional learning community, as identified in this literature, are the related elements of professional development and teacher collaboration.

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[36] See: Ancess, 1997; Ancess & Ort, 1999; Lear, 2001b; Legters, 1999; Mohr, 2000; Oxley, 1996; Sammon, 2000; Small Schools Workshop, 2000a; Wasley & Lear, 2001; and Wasley, et al., 2000.

Like the general effective schooling research, research on SLCs has demonstrated the importance of strong programs of professional development. For successful SLCs, Legters (1999) writes:

> *New models of professional development are needed—models in which teachers take an active role in their own growth and experience learning opportunities that are coherent, long range, and closely linked to immediate classroom contexts, school goals and real curricula.* (21)

In the SLC research, the most effective professional learning activities are provided primarily within the schools or their networks. Ancess and Ort (1999) found that,

> *If there is smart staffing, where a core of experienced teachers can mentor and socialize new or inexperienced teachers, a school can conduct much of its own professional development reinforcing interdependency and staff expertise.* (11)

Wasley and Lear (2001) make a similar observation. In their experience with high-performing SLCs, "Professional development is ongoing, embedded, and site-specific" (23). Most of these schools design their own professional development, which is focused on how to work more effectively with students. School staff review students' work using protocols developed with external service providers (23-24).

The Wasley, et al. researchers write that,

> *In some of the strongest small schools, we saw that faculty members worked hard to identify professional-development opportunities that helped improve the school, that strengthened their own professional skills, and positively affected student achievement...collegial interaction while learning new things can extend the depth of everyone's understanding.* (2000, 65)

The need to provide adequate time for teacher collaboration and planning appears over and over as a critical feature in the SLC literature. "From the beginning," writes Ancess, "time must be set aside for faculty to meet regularly, converse about students and inquire, problem solve, learn, and grow their pedagogy thoughtfully and critically together" (1997, 11). In successful SLCs, according to Fine and Somerville (1998a), "time is given for common planning and exchanging valuable information about students—and there is well-funded time for professional development" (108). By providing time and encouragement for improvement work, writes Gladden, "constant proactive small-scale change becomes the norm of the institution" (1998, 112).

Integrated Curriculum/Teaching Teams[37]

The discussion of curriculum quality earlier in this document established that even very small schools are able to offer a solid core curriculum comparable to that of larger schools. The small schools research also shows that a small school is able to do this by having teachers abandon traditional subject specialization in favor of integrating the curriculum around the school's thematic focus and forming teams to work with students on learning projects. "With their teachers, young people engage in challenging inquiry into topics that matter," says the Cross City Campaign's (2000a) best practices listing, and Fine and Somerville (1998a) provide further description:

> *The curriculum is cohesive—the many subject and course offerings fit together and create a solid, well-rounded education. Flexible scheduling and faculty teamwork allow for a level of depth and an interdisciplinary approach that provides students with a much richer educational experience.* (106)

Gladden adds that the curriculum is cohesive over time as well, providing students "a continuous educational experience across a range of grades" (1998, 116).

Large Repertoire of Instructional Strategies[38]

Smaller learning environments make it possible for teachers to identify and respond to the individual needs of their students in ways that often cannot even be attempted in large schools. Consequently, teachers in successful small schools/units develop and use a larger repertoire of instructional strategies than is commonly practiced in large schools. Most researchers and practitioners cite teachers' ability to tailor instruction to the individual student among the virtues of small schools.

According to Fine and Somerville (1998b), "the individualized approach to teaching and learning in small schools allows for the use of a variety of teaching methods to ensure that all students are exposed to rigorous curricula and achieve high standards" (106). Along with factors such as greater safety and a strong sense of accountability between schools and families, Wasley and others (2000, 33) identify "a greater variety in instructional approaches" as a key reason for the successes of the Chicago small schools they studied. "[A] more varied instructional repertoire for working with students" is also identified among the reasons the teachers in small schools felt a greater sense of self-efficacy than those in large schools. In particular, small size facilitates the use of active instructional techniques, such as inquiry learning, cooperative learning and work-based and other project-based learning (Legters, 1999, 19; Architecture Research Institute, 1999, 3).

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[37] See Ancess & Ort, 1999; Cross City Campaign 2000a,b; Fine & Somerville, 1998a; Gladden, 1998; Legters, 1999; Mohr, 2000; NASSP, 1996; Oxley, 1996; Small Schools Workshop, 2001a,b; and Wasley, et al., 2000.

[38] See Architecture Research Institute, 1999; Fine and Somerville, 1998b; Legters, 1999; Oxley, 1996; Roellke, 1996; and Wasley, et al., 2000.

Functional Accountability

Multiple Forms of Assessment[39]

Apropos of active learning, small school practitioners and researchers also claim that having students *demonstrate* their learning (in addition to taking the obligatory standardized tests) extends both students' learning and teachers' understanding of their students' learning needs. Even though "standardized test scores rule the political roost," as Small Schools Workshop staff put it, small school practitioners also need to "develop assessments that take advantage of personalized learning" (2001a, 2). Fine and Somerville (1998a) stress that schools "need to measure what students can do as well as what they know [and] this requires creative assessment techniques—not just multiple choice tests" (112). They also remind us that these assessments need to connect with values beyond the school: "It is important for performance-based standards and content-rich assessments to reflect communitywide consensus and have meaning in the community" (112). Wasley and Lear even recommend bringing the community into the process of assessing students' work by creating opportunities for them to review and comment on students' portfolios and exhibitions (2000, 24).

Each of the successful New York small schools studied by Ancess and Ort (1999), "has developed a performance assessment system that enables teachers and students to assess their work using multiple indicators and multiple instruments and that facilitates continuous improvement" (4). The use of assessment data to check the progress of the school as well as that of the individual students is also cited by the Small Schools Project. Among SSP's "core of common characteristics" exhibited by viable small schools is that "they use multiple forms of assessment to report on student accomplishment and to guide their efforts to improve their own school" (2001a, 2).

Accountability/Credibility[40]

Ultimately, of course, schools will be held accountable for results, and that is as it should be:

> *Accountability must be authentic and interwoven throughout the school by the people at the school level. Teachers, parents, administrators, students, and community members must be held accountable for students' achievement of rigorous curricula, graduation, and future success in postsecondary education and careers.* (Fine & Somerville, 1998a, 110)

Yet, schools require time to bring about improvements in student results—some researchers say three years or more, although many new small schools have seen such changes much sooner than that. In any case, there are indicators that can demonstrate accountability and

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[39] See Ancess, 1997; Ancess & Ort, 1999; Fine & Somerville, 1998a; Legters, 1999; Small Schools Project, 2001a; Small Schools Workshop, 2001a; Wasley, et al., 2000; and Wasley & Lear, 2001.

[40] See Ancess, 1997; Fine & Somerville, 1998a; Lee & Loeb, 2000; Mohr, 2000; and Wasley, et al., 2000.

establish credibility with stakeholders in advance of dramatic changes in student performance. Ancess (1997) writes

> *Although the percentage of graduates and the list of schools to which graduates are accepted are two of the most powerful credibility tests, other indicators develop a school's credibility prior to its delivering a graduating class. These include: a safe and orderly environment; accessible, responsive, and caring leaders and teachers; good teaching; delivery on critical aspects of the vision; instruction that is interesting, exciting, demanding, and supports students' success; and a steady stream of evidence attesting to student learning, progress, and achievement.* (12)

Several researchers place particular emphasis on one accountability indicator: a teaching staff with an attitude of efficacy, commitment, and collective responsibility for student learning (Lee & Loeb, 2000, 23-24; Mohr, 2000, 156; Wasley, et al., 2000, 38). Meier (1998) adds that schools can become more accountable by (1) creating strong internal accountability systems; (2) being accountable to other schools in their networks for the quality of their work through, for example, acting as one another's critical friends; (3) having their operations reviewed by neutral, "noncollegial" parties, such as formal review panels and public auditors; and (4) providing a shared body of credible information as a basis for reflections and judgments (89).

Districts, Boards, and Legislatures[41]

No school reform effort can succeed without the support of the school district administration and other key entities beyond the school. Ancess (1997) devotes considerable attention to this topic. She notes that state and local bureaucracies are often regarded "as obstacles instead of the supports they were intended to be" (16). A realist, Ancess goes on to point out that these entities "are crucial to the survival of new schools because they control information and access to resources" (16). Moreover,

> *since access to information and the acquisition of resources are critical to new school development, new school founders who develop a sophisticated knowledge and understanding of their bureaucracy and learn how business gets done, who is who, and how to network and negotiate put their school at a clear advantage.* (16)

She suggests that school people identify and connect with those individuals within bureaucracies who will interpret regulations to the advantage of the school and help to locate needed resources.

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[41] See Ancess & Ort, 1999; Ancess, 1997; Dewees, 1999; Gewertz, 2001; Wasley, et al., 2000; and Wasley & Lear, 2001.

"Obtaining the support of the superintendent, school board, and school principal [who presides over multiple SLCs] is also essential," writes Dewees (1999, 2), in the context of discussing the requirements for a school-within-a-school to be successful.

Ancess and Ort (1999) provide detail about the nature of this essential support. They indicate that the successes achieved by recently created small schools-within-schools in New York are partly due to a new kind of relationship with the board of education. From their involvement with creating a dozen new SLCs from large, failing high schools, they suggest that such a change requires that the board negotiate a new regulatory relationship with the campuses and individual schools. Specifically, they say, the focus needs to shift from compliance monitoring to support, technical assistance, and collaboration. The board needs to formulate policies for building and school self-governance, school size, enrollment, and safeguards against administrative discontinuities. Their experience suggests that it is also necessary for the board to develop allocation formulae to insure sufficient funds for resources, staffing positions, and management (4).

Wasley, et al. (2000) also note that the contemporary, deliberately small school is a new kind of creature for which existing policies and procedures do not work well. "Some board policies and procedures [in Chicago] that were designed with larger schools in mind...clash with the new policies and procedures being developed for the new small schools" (51). Consequently, "[a]ny system considering a move to small schools will have to confront the need to rethink and redesign major policies and common practices, since most of those principles were designed for larger schools" (66). The researchers make the following recommendation for districts that want to see the new SLCs succeed:

> *Provide waivers for smaller schools that release them from conflicting district policies; schools should be freed from policies requiring a particular curricular approach until such time as the school has demonstrated that its own approach isn't working. Separate schools-within-schools from their host schools, so that they are not subjected to the same kinds of policies as their larger, failing counterparts. Allow schools to negotiate student admissions procedures in keeping with the district's policies regarding equity. Redesign support for professional development that is building based and focused on the particular skills and knowledge students need.* (67)

Finally, according to Wasley and Lear (2001), "[s]chool boards or state legislators often insist that the reform efforts provide data about improvements quickly—data that the larger [host] school is rarely requested or able to provide" (25). There are accountability indicators that are reasonable for boards and legislatures to request and that they should request during a school's initial operations (more below), but researchers insist that dramatic changes in student performance is not one of them.

Networking with Other Small Learning Communities[42]

Passing mention has been made of networking among SLCs, both fledgling and well established, for purposes such as professional development. Researchers and experienced small school staff identify networking as a powerful source of support and encourage SLCs to improve their chances of success by connecting with one another. Together with efforts to build a strong internal community, Ancess (1997) notes that "networking with like-minded schools provides external support" (10). Specifically,

> *Networks that connect new schools to other like-minded schools mitigate against the pain and vulnerability of isolation inherent in school-starting and school-keeping. There can be both political and educational safety and freedom in numbers. Membership in the network can give a school the legitimacy and freedom to pursue an innovative course. It can broaden the new school's learning context by providing it with access to experienced schools as well as other new schools.* (12)

Meier (1998) sees participation in networks as a way that SLCs can increase their accountability. She argues that "schools must answer to one another for the quality of their work" and advocates the creation of "networks of sister schools" whose members utilize one another as critical friends (89). Mohr (2000) agrees and encourages schools to build "networks that provide genuine accountability, the kind that comes from commitment, not compliance" (157). Wasley, et al. (2000) even encourage those who fund SLC development to make it their business "to network new schools so that they can learn from one another" (67).

Thoroughgoing Implementation[43]

Finally, having learned that unsuccessful downsizing efforts are often the result of shallow implementation, experienced practitioners and researchers strongly recommend that those launching new SLCs install as many of the foregoing practices as they can, as soon as they can. Gladden (1998) writes,

> *By defining the important characteristics of small schools and understanding how small schools affect educational quality, educators and reformers can help create effective small schools and avoid school "reform" that means nothing more than insignificant reductions or freezes in school size.* (114)

Gewertz (2001) quotes Gates Foundation's education director, Tom Vander Ark as voicing a similar concern: "Large, comprehensive high schools will often do window-dressing reform. Not going far enough is the typical problem" (5). Further, according to Dewees (1999),

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[42] See Ancess, 1997; Ancess & Ort, 1999; Meier, 1998; Mohr, 2000; and Wasley, et al., 2000.
[43] Dewees, 1999; Gladden, 1998; Meier, 1998; Raywid, 1996; Wasley, et al., 2000; and Wasley & Lear, 2001.

> *The school-within-a-school model has met with varying degrees of success in different settings. The most critical factor for success is a commitment to implementing the program fully....very few school-within-a-school models have been fully implemented.* (2)

Wasley and Lear (2001) acknowledge that "making real change in the tightly woven structure of high schools is difficult," and consequently "schools attempting to become small do too little, too slowly" (24). Raywid (1996) describes a downsizing effort that failed because "the changes had occurred as incremental supplements or add-ons to existing arrangements, rather than replacements of them" (37). Since half-hearted implementation of the small-school concept simply does not bring about real change, Wasley and Lear's advice is to go for broke: When mired in bureaucracy, habit and resistance to change, "schools need a clean, bold break with practices that have served many students poorly—not a conditional and timid incrementalism" (25).

Barriers and Pitfalls

The movement for small schools...faces multiple barriers.

—Robert Gladden, 1998, p. 114

Human issues, not technical knowledge, are the most significant barriers to successful conversions of comprehensive high schools into new small autonomous schools. ...it is the personal, human question, 'what does this mean for me?' that is at the heart of resistance to change.

—Rick Lear, 2001b, p. 1

Certainly the "conditional and timid incrementalism" identified by Wasley and Lear is one major barrier to setting up and operating viable SLCs. They devote a whole section of their year 2001 *Educational Leadership* article to a discussion of this and other barriers identified in the course of their research and practice.

Cultural expectations. Wasley and Lear argue that we as a culture have deeply embedded, difficult-to-displace expectations of what a high school should be and should have. Many of us subscribe to a "collective nostalgia" about high school sports, dances, and so on, even if we never actually participated in such things. And some large-school features, such as sports teams and the high school band, are such "sacred cows" that many people are unwilling even to consider doing things differently. Wasley and Lear see in this the frustrating and limiting paradox—that "we want schools that are better, but not different" (24).

Still too large. Wasley and Lear are among the growing chorus of experts who argue that "so-called small schools aren't small enough"; that the optimal size for a small school is "closer to 200 than to 400 students" (25). And once schools get over 400 students, they argue, they begin to lose their personalization and focus. Gregory (2000) concurs:

> *A size of 400 or 500 makes sense only if one's intent is to conduct business as usual, a routine of textbook-dominated classes that are designed to dispense a curriculum that emphasizes the transmission of information from the old to the young via group instruction delivered within the confines of the school building. (13)*

Still too comprehensive. The title of the Mohr (2000) article cited in this report is "Small Schools Are Not Miniature Large Schools," a declaration with which Wasley and Lear concur. Like Mohr and Gregory (2000), they argue that SLCs that attempt to maintain comprehensive high school structures and practices—conventionally departmentalized faculty, rigid student placements, a dean of discipline, and so on—"are unlikely to be successful...comprehensive is as great a barrier to significant improvement in student accomplishment as large" (25). Mohr herself, in warning small school designers of common pitfalls, includes the folly of "thinking it is essential to provide a huge variety of

courses and activities" (2000, 148). She reminds us that where small SLCs can excel is in being focused, and consequently warns us not to confuse choice with variety.

Impatience for achievement changes. The previous section of this paper addresses the barrier to success created by decision makers who demand improvement data too early in the life of the new SLC. According to Wasley and Lear, "[t]he demand for instant evidence of success often leads to compromises that seem necessary for survival but decrease the possibility for long-term success." (25)

Laws, regulations, policies, procedures. The "bigger is better" conviction that for many years has fueled school consolidations and the construction of large schools, has also led to the creation of mandates and practices that favor large schools and centralized operations. "Most district and state laws, regulations, policies, and procedures reflect this attitude [and] state funding formulas often explicitly favor large high schools for school construction funding" (25), write Wasley and Lear. Gladden (1998), too, identifies "underfunding of small schools [and] governmental resistance to making small schools the norm" (114) as major barriers to their success. These barriers will need to be dismantled in order for new small schools to stand a fighting chance for success.

Rigidity. The standards movement is producing some unfortunate fallout that inhibits the functioning of new small schools, say Wasley and Lear:

> *Carefully developed standards can serve small schools well, but many districts and an increasing number of states are creating lock-step curriculums and adopting textbooks for all schools, thereby denying the particularity of school populations and cultures and removing room for teacher judgment in small schools…Such a rigid approach to reform has made almost impossible the entrepreneurial, quick-response, high-flexibility, customer-driven, shared-leadership environment now so highly admired in the business world.* (25)

They and others argue that, by contrast, "state legislators and school leaders are now adopting the same management-by-objectives approach that brought many of the nation's largest corporations to the brink of extinction during the past 25 years" (25).

Defensiveness. School personnel, many of whom attended large schools and have taught in them for a long time, "perceive the critique of large schools to be personal and respond defensively" (25). Their proposed solution to this barrier is to take the focus off what's wrong with large schools and "provide…alternative images of school organization and design—and changed teacher practice—so [school staff] can move beyond defensiveness to creative solutions" (25-26).

Tracking. Secondary education's fixation on academic tracking, discussed earlier in this report, is another obstacle. Researchers warn against allowing SLCs "to be used as a mechanism and rationale for tracking" (Visher, Teitelbaum & Emanuel, 1999, 22) or, more insidiously, "a euphemism for tracking" (Fine & Somerville, 1998a, 112).

Caught between why and how. I have addressed the importance of early, broad-based involvement in decisions and of detailed planning. That notwithstanding, it is probably good to heed Lear's observation that school discourse about *how* to downsize is sometimes unproductive because people have not really understood and accepted *why* to downsize:

> *In practice, a school often agrees to change—intellectually; it's not hard to acknowledge the need—but hasn't struggled sufficiently with the implications of that decision. Then, the how to part is held hostage to regular revisiting of the why part.* (2001b, 1)

Problems like this are no doubt part of the reason that experienced researchers and practitioners encourage developers to take plenty of time to get buy-in and to plan for the transition to SLCs.

"Amplified impact." Mohr (2000) encourages leaders not to forget that "everything in a small school has an amplified impact." She offers a nautical metaphor: "Large schools are ocean liners on a steadier course—for better or worse, they keep on going. Small schools are little sailboats, maneuverable but easily tipped" (144). Leaders are encouraged to cultivate solutions, personal relationships, and lines of communication that can help them keep the school stable and focused.

Demands on staff. Many of the sources I reviewed talk about the heavy demands SLC development and operation places on the energies of teachers and administrators. Ancess (1997) pulls no punches: "Starting a school is a daunting, formidable, and very difficult endeavor" (19), she says, and provides additional detail:

> *The beginning years of a school are enormously demanding on founding leaders...The tasks are uniquely taxing because founding leaders guide the transformation of the school from idea to reality by rooting it in the terra firma of administrative order while they simultaneously aim for the flexibility necessary for creative development.* (16)

Small wonder that Gladden (1998) found that some teachers "resist the heavy workload of small sch ɔls" (125). The impact of small-school teaching on one charter school teacher says it all: "It's put a smile on my lips and bags under my eyes" (Fine, 1994, quoted in Raywid, 1996, 51). The "bags" are important to consider; educators need to be aware of the demands they will face. But the "smile" is important, too. For most of the teachers and administrators quoted in the literature reviewed in preparation for this report, their small-school experience is the most rewarding work they have ever done.

Too little focus on the classroom. Despite the concurrence among experts that a sustained focus on student learning is essential for success, new SLCs sometimes have a hard time getting there. "As a leader," writes Mohr,

I learned that it was easy enough to say, "When the rest of the work is done, we'll focus on instruction"...I learned from hard experience that the moment when everything is "under control" just does not arrive. Knowing this, there has to be a constant balance between tending to the school's maintenance and focusing on instruction. It cannot be one first and then the other, and it cannot be that instruction just has to wait. (2000, 156-157)

These insights serve to underscore the importance of early and intensive focus on student learning as part of launching new SLCs.

Settling for too little. In his recent article about the potential of alternative schools to serve more students and serve them better, Tom Gregory quotes spiritual practitioner and author Thomas Merton, who wrote, "The biggest human temptation is to settle for too little" (2001, 581). Echoing Rick Lear's comment about the barriers imposed by "human issues," Gregory writes that "most of the real obstacles to change in education are not 'out there' but inside us" (2001, 580). We may believe that external forces prevent us from having more than a "little," but Gregory encourages alternative school staff and other educators to test the boundaries they believe limit their options. Based on his experience, at least some of these boundaries are more formidable to contemplate than to confront.

Other issues. Those with expertise in starting and maintaining SLCs have identified some additional problem areas which deserve mention. These have mainly to do with newly created SLCs having insufficient autonomy:

- Schools-within-schools may experience scheduling and space constraints imposed by the larger school with which they share buildings. (Raywid, 1996; Visher, Teitelbaum & Emanuel, 1999; Wasley, et al., 2000)

- In buildings with several schools, there are sometimes allegations of favored treatment, as well as conflicts over enrollment and probation. (Raywid, 1996; Visher, Teitelbaum & Emanuel, 1999)

- Staff relationship problems sometimes arise, especially between teachers who move to a school-within-a-school and those remaining with the larger school. (Lashway, 1998-99; Raywid, 1996)

- With multiple schools under one principal and teacher-leaders taking on some roles that principals have traditionally assumed, the principal's role can become ambiguous. (Lashway, 1998-99)

Emerging Issues

SLCs in the Suburbs

[A] wide consensus seems to have emerged...that schools larger than 1,000 are unwise choices for any community.

—Craig Howley, Marty Strange, and Robert Bickel, 2000, p. 4.

Whether we are looking at the negative effects of large, impersonal schools on the academic achievement of inner-city students, or the recent explosions of violence in large, impersonal schools in white middle-class suburbs, more people are becoming convinced that bigger is not better. And, as the literature abundantly shows, much energy is going into creating smaller, friendlier, more effective schools in urban areas. Thus far, however, there is no corresponding movement in suburban schools. Most have not experienced violence outbursts like those in Springfield, Littleton, Jonesboro, Conyers, or San Diego, and since large size does not sink their students' academic performance as it does that of poor and/or minority students, suburban schools have not been as motivated to change.

There are, however, rumblings of interest in doing things differently. For one thing, many suburban schools are experiencing large influxes of students whose first language is Spanish or Russian or Vietnamese rather than English; and these English language earners often do not fare well in large, impersonal school environments. To meet these students' needs and to create a more personable learning environment for all students, some suburban schools have created part-time, partly separated smaller units—though it is too soon to know how well these are working.

In addition, there are isolated examples of suburban downsizing based on the notion that "you don't have to be bad to get better." Gewertz (2001) reports on two large schools in suburban Cincinnati that are orderly, have low dropout rates, and achieve at average levels for their demographic profiles—in other words, schools that are doing just fine. "But district leaders here believe average isn't good enough; they want better." They are concerned that "there is too much acceptance of mediocrity." With Gates Foundation grant money, study of the small-schools research, and visiting another downsized suburban school (in Dallas) for ideas, the 2,300 students in the district's two high schools will be attending "themed" schools of 450 or fewer students.

The district (West Clermont) "may be the first suburban district that's considered fine—a good, quintessentially American district—to really ask the question, 'Are these schools serving the needs of all children?'" (Gewertz, 2001, 2). It is not likely to be the last.

"Small Schools, Race and High School Reform"

The name for this "trend" is actually the title of a recent invitational conference co-sponsored by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, Bank Street Small Schools Project, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, and the University of Washington's Small Schools Project. The conference was held at the University of Washington in Seattle in June, 2001 and attended by 47 researchers and practitioners from the small schools movement and the multicultural, bilingual, and special education communities. The stated goals of the conference were

> *(1) to find common agreements to further the small school agenda for all students, with a particular emphasis on students of color and/or low economic class; (2) to find disagreements that might be useful for continued conversation that will result in fuller understandings, not necessarily resolutions; and (3) to explore opportunities for working collaborations on specific issues of study and practice.*

A summary of the conference indicates that the following issues were addressed—issues which have implications for the future of SLCs, particularly in urban areas:

> *The purpose of schooling*. Educators have different perspectives on what schooling is for, and thus different views of whether a school is successful.
> *The possibility of segregation*. The cohesive communities of young people and adults small schools are supposed to create might end up excluding those outside the school.
> *The lack of explicit dialogue on race*. Participants acknowledged that the vast majority of small schools are led by whites, and while these school leaders may operate with the best of intentions, they set the agenda and tone for their schools.
> *The concern over the control of small schools*. There is a concern that the white leadership of the small-schools movement may be erecting a system in which white educators are taking control over the education of the African American and Latino community. Members of the community are either subservient or powerless. (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2001, 3)

This summary has been quoted at length because the issues are important ones and because the Seattle conference appears to be the first in a series of explorations that may include additional gatherings, journal publications, and the development and pursuit of a research agenda.

SUMMARY

The following is a recap of the major points made in this document.

1. **Research Support.** Research evidence supports decreasing the size of schools to improve student outcomes, school safety, equity, and teacher and parent attitudes.

2. **Increased Numbers of Small Schools.** In the past ten years, new small schools have been proliferating in low-SES minority communities in many cities, including Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Seattle, and Oakland.

3. **Available Resources.** Growing recognition of the benefits of small schools has led government and private funding sources to make millions of dollars available for implementing small learning communities (SLCs), particularly at the high school level.

4. **Focus of Literature.** Recent small schools literature focuses on definitions of various kinds of SLCs, SLCs and student outcomes, key elements for success, barriers and pitfalls new SLCs commonly encounter, and emerging trends.

5. **Smallness is Insufficient.** Small size, in and of itself, is insufficient to produce improved student outcomes.

6. **Many Kinds of SLCs.** There are many different kinds of SLCs—from autonomous small schools to "houses" that share many of the elements of their host school and are under that school's authority.

7. **Outcomes.** The outcomes typically produced by SLCs, in contrast to large schools, include:
   a. Higher achievement
   b. Reduction of the negative effects of poverty on achievement
   c. Increased student affiliation with their school community
   d. Greater safety and order
   e. Much less truancy and many fewer dropouts
   f. Similar college entrance exam scores, acceptance rates, GPAs, and completion
   g. Higher levels of extracurricular participation in traditional small schools; role of extracurricular participation differs across SLCs
   h. Higher levels of parent and community involvement and greater satisfaction
   i. More positive teacher attitudes and satisfaction
   j. Comparable core curricula
   k. Lower costs per student graduated

8. **Self-determination**. The most effective SLCs have high levels of self-determination, as indicated by:
   a. *Autonomy* – As much decision making authority as possible over space, schedule, budget, curriculum, instruction, and personnel
   b. *Separateness* – Physical and psychological distance from other SLCs in the same building
   c. *Distinctiveness* – Attributes (e.g., collaboration, humor) that set it apart from other SLCs
   d. *Self-selection of Teachers and Students* – Based on shared interest in its thematic focus
   e. *Flexible Scheduling* – Ability to alter the schedule in response to student needs or unanticipated learning opportunities

9. **Identity**. The most successful SLCs have strong identities, expressed as:
   a. *Vision/Mission* – "Where we are going" and "why we are going there" as determined by all school and community groups; used to guide planning and action
   b. *Thematic Focus* – Curricular area, instructional approach, topical area, or other organizing principle
   c. *Focus on Student Learning* – High learning expectations, academic rigor, individualization
   d. *Detailed Planning* –Precedes launching new SLC; specifies proposed student and teacher population, administrative procedures, instructional program, assessment plans, governance structure, etc.

10. **Personalization**. Well-run SLCs are strongly focused on personalization, through attributes such as:
   a. *Knowing Students Well* – Strategies for knowing all student well increases school safety, decreases misbehavior, and supports individualization of learning
   b. *Heterogeneity/Nontracking* – Easier to manage in small settings; avoids negative effects of tracking
   c. *Looping* – Students and teachers together for multiple years; facilitates interpersonal relationships, mutual respect, and learning
   d. *Parent and Community Involvement* – Parents viewed as critical allies, participate in instructional support and governance

11. **Support for Teaching**. Teaching is supported in exemplary SLCs through:
   a. *Leadership/Decision Making* – SLC leaders lead by inspiring staff, share decision making with all stakeholders, decisions are based on data, leaders are knowledgeable about curriculum and pedagogy
   b. *Professional Development and Collaboration* – Professional development teacher designed and site specific, time provided for collaboration
   c. *Integrated Curriculum/Teaching Teams* – Traditional subject area boundaries abandoned, curriculum organized around thematic focus and across grade levels

d. *Large Repertoire of Instructional Strategies* – Instruction tailored to student needs, enhances teacher self-efficacy

12. **Functional Accountability**. Successful SLCs demonstrate functional accountability in many ways, including:
    a. *Multiple Forms of Assessment* – Assessments reflect personalized learning, students *demonstrate* knowledge and skills, may involve parents and community
    b. *Accountability and Credibility* – Student achievement is ultimate accountability indicator but takes time; newly launched SLCs demonstrate credibility by being safe, orderly, accessible, responsive, and exhibiting validated teaching approaches
    c. *Districts, Boards, and Legislatures* – Establish relationships with supportive individuals within bureaucracies, renegotiate regulatory functions as needed
    d. *Networking with Other Small Learning Communities* – Confers legitimacy, provides support, creates lateral accountability (accountability to peers)
    e. *Thoroughgoing Implementation* – Avoids common problem of shallow implementation of reforms, makes "clean break" with past practices

13. **Barriers and Pitfalls**. Researchers, practitioners, and external service providers caution those wanting to launch SLCs about various commonly encountered barriers and pitfalls, including:
    a. Cultural expectations about how schools should organize and operate
    b. Insufficient reductions in size (many say they should not be larger than 200)
    c. Attempts to function like a large comprehensive high school
    d. Impatience for achievement changes on the part of those outside the school
    e. Laws, regulations, policies, and procedures developed with large schools in mind
    f. Rigidity produced by the standards movement
    g. Defensiveness on the part of school personnel who take stakeholders' desire for change personally
    h. Academic tracking
    i. Staff who have not fully understood and accepted why the school has chosen to downsize
    j. Vulnerability to destabilizing influences
    k. Large time and energy demands from staff
    l. Too little focus on the classroom
    m. Too little innovation

14. **Emerging Issues**. Two emerging issues in small school restructuring include:
    a. Growing interest in and implementation of SLCs in suburban schools
    b. Need for more multicultural participation in small schools movement

Conclusion

The opening words of this report refer to the evidence in support of small schools as "old news." The fact that "change is difficult" is considerably older news, though our familiarity with that fact does not seem to make the experience of change any easier. In her discussion of the transition to small learning communities, Sammon (2000) illuminates why this change is especially difficult for us:

> *The challenge for educators across the nation has become how to design and develop a teacher corps and a school structure that allows for a school that operates in a completely different manner than the classrooms we experienced in our own education.* (2)

Completely different from what we experienced. So tenaciously do we hold onto the way we have experienced school that proposed change of any kind can provoke uproar. Witness the experience of some progressive educators of this author's acquaintance, who were so frustrated by community resistance to a proposed school program, that they developed an informational brochure that reads, "Preparing Children for Their Future…Not Your Past."

Despite the barriers and potential pitfalls described in this report, those who believe in the potential of small learning communities have created many successful ones. Researchers have found that students benefit from them, and the testimonials of administrators and teachers who work in them are extremely compelling. Consider the optimism of researcher-practitioner Jacqueline Ancess. While no stranger to the difficulties involved in starting and running a small school, Ancess (1997, 2) offers a stirring vision: "Launching a school is a statement of belief in the possibilities of education—the belief that education can make a difference in the lives of individuals and in the life of our democracy."

Web Resources

The following web sites provide links to resources on small schools/small learning communities, including research reports, theory papers, journal and newspaper articles, "how-to" guidelines, program descriptions, and technical assistance providers.

Annenberg Institute for School Reform, Brown University, Providence, RI
http://www.annenberginstitute.org/index.html

Annie E. Casey Foundation-Small Schools
http://www.aecf.org/publications/success/smschool.htm

California's New American High Schools
http://www.sonoma.edu/cihs/nahs/

Carnegie Corporation of New York
http://www.carnegie.org/

Center for Collaborative Education
http://www.ccebos.org/

Center for Education Reform, Washington, DC
http://edreform.com/index.htm

Coalition of Essential Schools, Oakland, CA
http://www.essentialschools.org/

Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform
http://www.crosscity.org/

Small Schools Coaches Collaborative, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
http://www.essentialschools.org/

Small Schools Listserve
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/smallschools/

Small Schools Project, Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington, Seattle, WA
http://www.smallschoolsproject.org/about/index.html

Small Schools Workshop, University of Illinois at Chicago
http://www.smallschoolsworkshop.org/index.html

U.S. Charter Schools:
http://www.uscharterschools.org/

U.S Department of Education's Smaller Learning Communities:
http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SLCP/

Key References

Ancess, J., and Ort, S.W. *How the Coalition Campus Schools Have Re-imagined High School: Seven Years Later. Executive Summary*. New York: National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1999. Available: http://128.59.90.27/~ncrest/aera_ancess.pdf

Summarizes the history and outcomes of a project begun in 1992 that restructured two failing high schools into 11 small, autonomous schools, each with 300-400 students. Among the results thus far are (1) achievement at the five schools in the Manhattan cohort is the highest among the high school reform models, (2) the dropout rate for these schools is the lowest among those models, and (3) a random sample of 1998 Manhattan cohort graduates reveals a college going rate of 89 percent.

Architecture Research Institute, Inc. "Small Schools Information Center." Website created and maintained by ARI, 1999. Available: http://208.55.38.242/ari/info/programs/smallschool/index.html

Draws on research to provide an array of different kinds of information about small schools, including definitions, founding principles, benefits, sponsoring organizations, a bibliography, examples of exemplary small schools, publications, educational associations and organizations, and links.

Ayers, W.; Bracey, G.; and Smith, G. *The Ultimate Education Reform? Make Schools Smaller*. Milwaukee, WI: Center for Education Research, Analysis, and Innovation, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, December 2000. Available: www.uwm.edu/Dept/CERAI/edpolicyproject/cerai-00-35.htm

Briefly summarizes research demonstrating that well-operated small schools have a positive effect on achievement; violence, disruption, and vandalism; student sense of belonging; attendance; graduation rates; teacher satisfaction; school climate; costs; and parent/community involvement.

Barker, R., and Gump, P. *Big School Small School: High School Size and Student Behavior*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1964.

Reports research on the relative merits of large and small schools in terms of their effects on both academic and extracurricular outcomes.

Bickel, R. *School Size, Socioeconomic Status, and Achievement: A Texas Replication of Inequity in Education with a Single-Unit School Addendum*. Huntington, WV: Marshall University, 1999 (ED 433 986).

Presents results of a replication study of the effects of school size in over 6,000 schools in Texas. In keeping with previous research conducted in West Virginia, California, and Georgia, this study found that the achievement differential between low- and higher-SES students is considerably less in smaller schools. All students, regardless of SES, showed lower achievement as school *district* size increased.

Cotton, K. *School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance*. Close-Up #20. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1996. Available: http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/10/c020.html

Synthesizes research on the effects of school size on student achievement, attitudes, and behavior; teacher and administrator attitudes; curriculum quality; and costs, and finds smaller schools to be superior on nearly all measures. Identifies differences between large- and small-school practices that account for the differences in results.

Cushman, K. "How Small Schools Increase Student Learning (and What Large Schools Can Do About It)." *Principal* 79/2 (November 1999): 20-22. Available: www.naesp.org/comm/p1199b.htm

Provides overview information about small urban elementary schools that have been created through subdividing larger schools and which are exhibiting improved student achievement and behavior as a result. Offers research findings supporting such downsizing.

Dewees, S. *The School-within-a-School Model.* ERIC Digest. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1999 (ED 438 147). Available: www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed438147.html

Reviews research on schools-within-schools, defined here as "a separate and autonomous unit formally authorized by the board of education and/or superintendent [that] plans and runs its own program, has its own staff and students, and receives its own separate budget." Advantages include greater cohesiveness and commitment; potential disadvantages include rivalries and dramatic changes in existing relationships.

Duke, D.L., and Trautvetter, S. *Reducing the Negative Effects of Large Schools*. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities, 2001. Available: www.edfacilities.org/ir/ncefpubs/size.pdf

Reviews the research on the benefits of small schools and identifies four main ways that school systems have mitigated the effects of large school size: (1) building new small schools, (2) utilizing satellite facilities, (3) reorganizing and reallocating space in existing schools, and (4) renovating and redesigning existing schools. Discusses the advantages and disadvantages of each approach, and identifies design decisions to be considered when downsizing schools.

Fine, M. "Introduction: What's So Good about Small Schools?" In *Small Schools, Big Imaginations: A Creative Look at Urban Public Schools*, edited by M. Fine and J.I. Somerville. Chicago, IL: Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, May 1998, 2-13.

Draws from research and experience to explain why small schools work well in general and especially for poor and ethnic minority students. Provides data on improvements in student achievement in small schools. Includes the perceptions of a group of students in New York about their experience in small schools. Identifies attributes of small schools that account for their success.

Fine, M., and Somerville, J.I. "Essential Elements of Small Schools." In *Small Schools, Big Imaginations: A Creative Look at Urban Public Schools*, edited by M. Fine and J.I. Somerville. Chicago, IL: Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, May 1998a, 104-112.

Identifies the basic attributes that small schools must have in order to be successful, according to researchers and small school practitioners, including school size; a focus on student learning; collaborative teams of teachers, parents, and community members; honest talk among educators; accountability; and high standards for all students. Describes these in terms of "what is" and "what could be."

Gladden, R. "The Small School Movement: A Review of the Literature." In *Small Schools, Big Imaginations: A Creative Look at Urban Public Schools*, edited by M. Fine and J.I. Somerville. Chicago, IL: Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, May 1998, 113-133.

Reviews research literature from the past ten years that identifies direct or indirect (mediated) effects of high school size on (1) achievement, attitude, dropouts and other student outcomes, and (2) level of teacher satisfaction. When applicable, the author draws a distinction between the effects of small schools in general and the effects of "focus" schools—charters, schools-within-schools and other "theme" schools. Confirms and refines previous findings.

Gregory, T. *School Reform and the No-Man's Land of High School Size*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, December 2000. Available: smallschoolsproject.org/articles/download/gregory.pdf

Reports on a research analysis leading to the conclusion that creating "smaller learning communities" out of large high schools, as this is usually carried out, is both different from and inferior in its effects to true, autonomous small schools. Argues that such smaller communities often fail because of issues regarding size, continuity, autonomy, time, and control. The "no-man's land" is from 200 students (the size of many of the

most successful small schools) and 400 students (the downward limit of most "smaller learning communities").

Haller, E.J.; Monk, D.H.; Spotted Bear, A.; Griffith, J.; and Moss, P. "School Size and Program Comprehensiveness: Evidence From High School and Beyond." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 12/2 (Summer 1990): 109-120.

Uses data from the High School and Beyond study to examine the relationship between the size of schools and the comprehensiveness of their mathematics, science, and foreign language programs. Found that even very small schools offer a strong core program in these areas and that the advanced and alternative courses larger schools can offer are taken by relatively few students.

Howley, C.; Strange, M.; and Bickel, R. *Research about School Size and School Performance in Impoverished Communities*. ERIC Digest. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 2000 (ED 448 968). Available: www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed449968.html

Reports the results of a series of replication studies, collectively known as the "Matthew Project," that examined the relationship among school size, student socioeconomic status, and student achievement. Found that the well-known negative effects of poverty on achievement are significantly lessened when poor children attend smaller schools.

Lashway, L. "School Size: Is Small Better?" *Research Roundup* 15/2 (1998-99). Available: eric.uoregon.edu/publications/roundup/W98-99.html

Briefly identifies key points from five recent articles on school size and small schools. The authors cite the many advantages of small schools for both elementary and secondary students. Different types of small schools are identified, along with a few actual schools to provide a sense of the diversity of small-school structures and curricular focus.

Lee, V.E., and Loeb, S. "School Size in Chicago Elementary Schools: Effects on Teachers' Attitudes and Students' Achievement." *American Educational Research Journal* 37/1 (Spring 2000): 3-31.

Looks at data from nearly 5,000 teachers and 23,000 students in grades six and eight in Chicago schools to identify relationships among school size, teacher attitudes, and student achievement. Finds that small size (fewer than 400 students) has a beneficial effect on both (1) teacher attitudes about collective responsibility for student learning, and (2) student learning itself. In addition, positive teacher attitudes about collective responsibility are positively related to student achievement.

Oxley, D. "Organizing Schools into Smaller Units: The Case for Educational Equity." In *Practical Approaches to Achieving Student Success in Urban Schools*. Edited by D.E.

Gordon and J.R. Shafer. Philadelphia: Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success; National Research Center on Education in the Inner Cities, 1996 (ED 419 862).

Cites the advantages of small unit organization, especially for minority and low-SES students, and identifies research-based strategies for using smaller settings to best advantage. Profiles an American and a German school that are making the most of their small size and heterogeneous grouping.

Raywid, M.A. *Current Literature on Small Schools*. ERIC Digest. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, January 1999 (ED 425 049). Available: www.ed.gov/database/ERIC_Digests/ed425049.html

Provides a brief summary of the kinds of research being conducted now that the superiority of small schools has been established "with a clarity and at a level of confidence rare in the annals of education research" (1). Focuses on the meaning of "small," equity issues, relative costs, the role of unions in relation to small schools, and essential elements for success.

Raywid, M.A. *Taking Stock: The Movement To Create Mini-Schools, Schools-Within-Schools, and Separate Small Schools*. New York: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1996 (ED 396 045). Available: http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/monographs/uds108/

Reviews research conducted since 1960 on house plans and schools-within-schools, together with examining the author's own documentation, evaluation, and policy studies of 22 schools-within-schools and small schools since 1980. Describes downsizing efforts in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, and finds that the smaller learning communities most likely to raise achievement, lower dropout rates, and increase student participation are those designed to be separate, autonomous, distinctive entities.

Roellke, C. *Curriculum Adequacy and Quality in High Schools Enrolling Fewer Than 400 Pupils (9-12)*. ERIC Digest. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1996. (ED 401 090). Available: www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed401090.html

Cites research demonstrating that small high schools (those with 400 or fewer students in grades nine-12) can offer curricula that compare favorably with the offerings of larger high schools. By making use of integrated curricula, innovative scheduling, multiage grouping, peer tutoring, individualized instruction, video technologies, and the Internet, small high schools can prepare their students as well or better than larger high schools can.

Stiefel, L.; Berne, R.; Iatarola, P.; and Fruchter, N. "High School Size: Effects on Budgets and Performance in New York City." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 22/1 (Spring 2000): 27-39.

Analyzes data on 121 New York City high schools that are mature enough to have good data on costs and outcomes. Notes that the preponderance of the research on school size indicates small schools produce superior achievement outcomes for poor and minority students. Since the New York study found that costs per student graduated are similar in large and small schools, the researchers encourage policymakers to support the creation of more small high schools.

Texas Education Agency. *School Size and Class Size in Texas Public Schools*. Policy Research Report Number 12. Austin, TX: Texas Education Agency, Division of Policy Planning and Evaluation, 1999 (ED 433 977).

Identifies recent and projected increases in the state's student population and looks at the research on school and class size to gauge the likely effects of these increases. Findings from national and Texas research on the effects of school and class size on student outcomes are similar and are congruent with those reported by other research analysts. Makes recommendations and looks at different strategies for reducing school and class size, e.g., schools-within-schools and part-time class size reduction.

Wasley, P.A.; Fine, M.; King, S.P.; Powell, L.C.; Holland, N.E.; Gladden, R.M.; and Mosak, E. *Small Schools: Great Strides. A Study of New Small Schools in Chicago*. New York: The Bank Street College of Education, 2000. Available: http://www.bankstreet.edu/news/SmallSchools.pdf

Reports on an in-depth study of the effects of attending small (fewer than 350 students) and large schools in the Chicago Public Schools. For the quantitative part of their study, researchers focused on the 143 small schools in the Chicago system that were in operation by 1997. A qualitative analysis of eight small schools was also conducted. Compared with large schools, the small schools had better attendance, fewer dropouts, greater student affiliation and persistence, greater course completion, and better scores on standardized achievement tests. School staff, parents, community partners and other community members associated with the small schools were more satisfied than those associated with large schools.

General References

Ancess, J. *Urban Dreamcatchers: Launching and Leading New Small Schools*. New York: National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, & Teaching, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1997. Available: http://smallschoolsproject.org/articles/download/dreamcatchers.pdf

Presents, from the perspective of an experienced researcher-practitioner, a discussion of guidelines and common pitfalls associated with starting and sustaining new, deliberately small schools. Topics addressed include developing and implementing a vision, factors in launching a successful school, key leadership qualities, and early expectations. A planning guide based on the author's experience in launching a new school is appended.

Annenberg Institute for School Reform. "Small Schools, Race and High School Reform. Meeting Summary Report." Invitational Conference at the University of Washington, Seattle, June 19, 2001. Available: http://www.annenberginstitute.org/convening/race_description.html and http://www.annenberginstitute.org/convening/race_summary.html

Provides an overview of a conference attended by nearly 50 researchers and practitioners from the small schools, multicultural, bilingual, and special education communities. Participants discussed the small schools movement in relation to issues such as (1) the purpose of schooling, (2) the possibility of segregation, (3) the lack of explicit dialogue on race, and (4) the concern over the control of small schools. Minority educators and researchers expressed concern that the small schools movement, which has focused on minority students, is almost entirely led by white educators.

Cocklin, B. *A Journey of Transition: From Gumly Gumly Public to Secondary School*. Paper presented at the Joint Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education and the New Zealand Association for Research in Education, Melbourne, Australia, November-December, 1999 (ED 441 629).

Uses interviews to gather information from three Australian teenagers about the effect of their transition from a very small "primary" (elementary) school to much larger secondary schools. Students viewed social environment of the secondary schools positively, but did not like the remoteness, favoritism, and control orientation of the secondary teachers.

Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform. "Flash Facts- Issue #1: Small Schools," 2000a. Available: http://www.crosscity.org/pubs/flashfacts1.htm

Provides a brief summary of the research on the benefits of small schools in bulleted outline form.

Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform. "Flash Facts- Issue #2: High Schools in Focus," 2000b. Available: http://www.crosscity.org/pubs/flashfacts2.htm

Provides overview data on high school statistics and research-supported practices for productive learning in high schools.

Fine, M., and Somerville, J.I. *Small Schools, Big Imaginations: A Creative Look at Urban Public Schools*. Chicago, IL: Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, May 1998b (ED 427 127).

Provides information about the movement to create and maintain small schools in urban environments. Includes profiles of several small urban schools and evidence of their effectiveness; guidelines for creating small schools; first-person stories of teachers, parents, administrators, and students associated with small schools; findings from the small schools research; and a bibliography and resource listing.

Gewertz, C. "The Breakup: Suburbs Try Smaller High Schools." *Education Week*, May 2, 2001. Available: www.edweek.org/ew/ew_printstory.cfm?slug=33hs.h20

Describes the motivations, plans, dreams, and apprehensions of those associated with dividing two large suburban Cincinnati high schools into smaller schools. School downsizing in middle class suburbs is a relatively new development, and the article notes stakeholders' attempts to capitalize on the experience of those who have created and are operating smaller learning communities in urban settings.

Gregory, T. "Fear of Success? Ten Ways Alternative Schools Pull Their Punches." *Phi Delta Kappan* 82/8 (April 2001): 577-581.

Identifies common barriers to alternative schools achieving greater success than they typically do, and argues that there are things these schools can do to get around—or even topple—some of these barriers.

Kacan, G.M., and Schipp, M.K. "Shrinking High Schools." *IndustryClick* (online periodical), November 1, 2000. Available: industryclick.com//magazinearticle.asp?magazinearticleid=32975&mode=print

Cites research support for schools-within-schools (SWS) and describes the approaches taken by several large schools around the country to creating smaller learning communities (SWS and 'houses") within their existing buildings. These smaller entities have been established only recently, and no data are reported about their operations or effectiveness.

Klonsky, S., and Klonsky, M. "Countering Anonymity Through Small Schools." *Educational Leadership* 57/1 (September 1999): 38-41.

Describes the City of Chicago's small schools movement and its promising outcomes for countering anonymity, increasing safety, and promoting student affiliation and learning. Describes the structure of several of the new small schools, cites key events in the history of the movement, and provides detail about Teacher Talk, a staff development protocol wherein several teachers focus on one teacher, one student, and that student's work with that teacher.

Lear, R. "Questions to Consider about Conversions of Large High Schools." Workshop Handout. Seattle, WA: Small Schools Project, Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington, 2001a.

Provides a list of questions for people to take into account as they consider which of the many models for smaller learning communities to implement in their high schools.

Lear, R. "Thinking about Conversions." Workshop Handout. Seattle, WA: Small Schools Project, Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington, 2001b.

Presents nine key points for educators to consider as they move toward small school restructuring—points that can increase their likelihood of success and avoid common pitfalls.

Legters, N.E. *Small Learning Communities Meet School-to-Work: Whole-School Restructuring for Urban Comprehensive High Schools*. Report No. 31. Baltimore, MD: Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, Johns Hopkins University, January 1999.

Identifies problems associated with the large, urban comprehensive high school and reforms, including ninth grade houses and career academies, developed to address these problems. Profiles Patterson High School in Baltimore, which has implemented these reforms to good effect. Identifies challenges schools typically encounter when implementing reforms.

Meier, D. "Can the Odds Be Changed?" In *Small Schools, Big Imaginations: A Creative Look at Urban Public Schools*, edited by M. Fine and J.I. Somerville. Chicago, IL: Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, May 1998, 85-92 (ED 427 127).

Explains how successful small schools achieve their success and argues that their very particularity means that they can never be scaled up. Describes the kinds of support necessary for a proliferation of distinct, successful, small schools to occur.

Mitchell, S. "Jack and the Giant School." *The New Rules* 2/1 (Summer 2000): 1-10. Available: http://www.newrules.org/journal/nrsum00schools.htm

Summarizes research on the benefits of small schools, gives examples of successful schools, and describes the differences between the small schools movement in urban and rural areas. Speculates on future trends.

Mohr, N. "Small Schools Are Not Miniature Large Schools. Potential Pitfalls and Implications for Leadership." In *A Simple Justice: The Challenge of Small Schools*, edited by W. Ayers, M. Klonsky, and G. Lyon. New York: Teachers College Press, 2000, 139-158. Available: http://www.smallschoolsproject.org/articles/download/MOHRleadership.PDF

Draws from the author's experience as a founder and principal of a small school in New York to identify and describe common pitfalls associated with starting and maintaining deliberately small, urban schools. The title refers to one of the chapter's main points—that attempting to apply the large-school model to operating a small school will not bring positive results.

Muir, E. "Smaller Schools: How Much More Than a Fad?" *American Educator* 24/4 (Winter 2000-2001): 40-46. Available: http://www.aft.org/publications/american_educator/winter00-01/SmallSchools.pdf

Draws from recent research on the effects of school size on student outcomes to determine the authenticity of claims that small schools are superior to large ones according to several key measures. Concludes that, while there are still some research questions to be answered (which kind of small school is most effective, why the greater benefits for poor and minority children, what long-term effects might be), the evidence favoring smaller schools is encouraging.

National Association of Secondary School Principals. "Organization and Time: Restructuring Space and Time for a More Flexible Education." In *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution*. Alexandria, VA: NASSP; New York: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1996, 45-51 (ED 393 205).

Presents research-based recommendations for restructuring high schools for higher-quality learning experiences and outcomes. This chapter focuses on providing students greater personalization and flexibility through changes in scheduling and use of space.

Oakes, J. *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985.

Presents findings on the effects of ability grouping—and particularly secondary-level academic tracking—on student achievement, attitudes, and behavior. Concludes that tracking is detrimental to students and discusses dilemmas posed by its persistent use in schools.

Raywid, M.A., and Oshiyama, L. "Musings in the Wake of Columbine: What Can Schools Do?" *Phi Delta Kappan* 81/6 (February 2000): 444-449. Available: http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kray0002.htm

Identifies research-supported practices that can increase a sense of community and reduce the likelihood of violent, deadly events like that of Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado in 1999. These include reducing school size, greater continuity within the school day and across school years, and providing students sustained and meaningful contact with adults who known them well.

Sammon, G.M. *Creating and Sustaining Small Learning Communities: A Practitioner's Guide and CD ROM Tool Kit for Career Academies and Other Small Learning Communities*. Silver Spring, MD: GMS Partners, Inc., 2000.

Presents background information and a comprehensive approach high schools can follow to develop and maintain small learning communities that are tailored to their individual situations. Discusses trends, definitions, school self-assessment, planning, implementation steps, student activities, program maintenance, and evaluation, as well as providing resource information. Includes a CD-ROM with overviews, forms, and templates.

Small Schools Project. "About Small Schools." Seattle, WA: Small Schools Project, Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington, Summer 2001a. Available: www.smallschoolsproject.org/aboutss/index.html

Offers basic information, in "fact sheet" format, about new, deliberately small high schools. Draws from research on the impact of school size on students, teachers, and parents.

Small Schools Project. "Organizations." Seattle, WA: Small Schools Project, Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington, Summer 2001b. Available: http://www.smallschoolsproject.org/organizations/index.html

Provides a listing of major organizations that provide funding, information resources, and technical assistance for creating and maintaining small schools.

Small Schools Workshop. "Eight Steps to Creating Small Schools." Chicago, IL: Small Schools Workshop, Updated 2001a. Available: http://www.smallschoolsworkshop.org/research.html

Provides a listing and brief discussion of the eight steps delineated by the Chicago-based Small Schools Workshop for starting up a small school: (1) understanding the need for change, (2) creating a vision, (3) teacher self-selection, (4) choosing a focus, (5) integrating and aligning curriculum and instruction, (6) building a professional

community, (7) getting a buy-in from students and parents, and (8) developing assessments that take advantage of personalized learning.

Small Schools Workshop. "What Are Small Schools?" Chicago, IL: Small Schools Workshop, Updated 2001b. Available: http://www.smallschoolsworkshop.org/info1.html

Identifies key attributes of small schools, including common features, what small schools look like, what the benefits of small schools are, and common misconceptions about small schools.

U.S. Department of Education. "Smaller Learning Communities: Strategies." Washington, DC: USDOE. Updated: February 2001. Retrieved: 07-11-01. Available: http://ed.gov/offices/OESE/SLCP/strategies.html

Identifies, describes, and gives examples of ways that smaller learning communities can be implemented in large high schools. Examples given are schools recognized through the federal New American High Schools Initiative.

Visher, M.G.; Teitelbaum, P.; and Emanuel, D. "Create Small Learning Environments Enabling Students and Teachers to Work Together." *Key High School Reform Strategies: An Overview of Research Findings. New American High Schools: High Schools at the Leading Edge of Reform*. Washington, DC: Office of Vocational and Adult Education, March 1999, 19-26 (ED 430 271). Available: http://ericae.net/ericdc/ED430271.htm

Focuses on smaller learning communities as one of the New American High Schools strategies. Presents research findings regarding the effects of smaller learning communities on student learning. Analysis includes identification of problems that schools have encountered when dividing a school into nonautonomous communities.

Wasley, P.A., and Lear, R.J. "Small Schools, Real Gains." *Educational Leadership* 58/6 (March 2001): 22-27. Available: http://www.smallschoolsproject.org/articles/download/realgains.PDF

Gives an overview of the research on the new, small-by-design schools in several of the nation's large cities and cites reasons for their effectiveness. Also identifies barriers to the proliferation of small schools and offers indications of how these might be overcome. The authors are a key researcher of and an experienced technical assistance provider to small schools.

WestEd and the U.S. Department of Education. *Overview of Charter Schools*. 2000. Available: www.uscharterschools.org/pub/uscs_docs/gi/overview.htm

Provides overview information on charter schools—what they are, their potential benefits, their history, and the nature of laws governing them. This information is included here because many new small schools are charter schools. Other pages at the www.uscharterschools.org website provide other information, such as a startup and assistance menu.

Creating Communities of Learning & Excellence

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The mission of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) is to improve educational results for children, youth, and adults by providing research and development assistance in delivering equitable, high-quality educational programs. A private, nonprofit corporation, NWREL provides research and development assistance to education, government, community agencies, business, and labor. NWREL is part of a national network of 10 educational laboratories funded by the U.S. Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) to serve the Northwest region of Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. Now in its fourth decade, NWREL reaffirms the belief that strong public schools, strong communities, strong families, and strong children make a strong nation. We further believe that every student must have equal access to high-quality education and the opportunity to succeed, and that strong schools ensure equity and excellence for all students.

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